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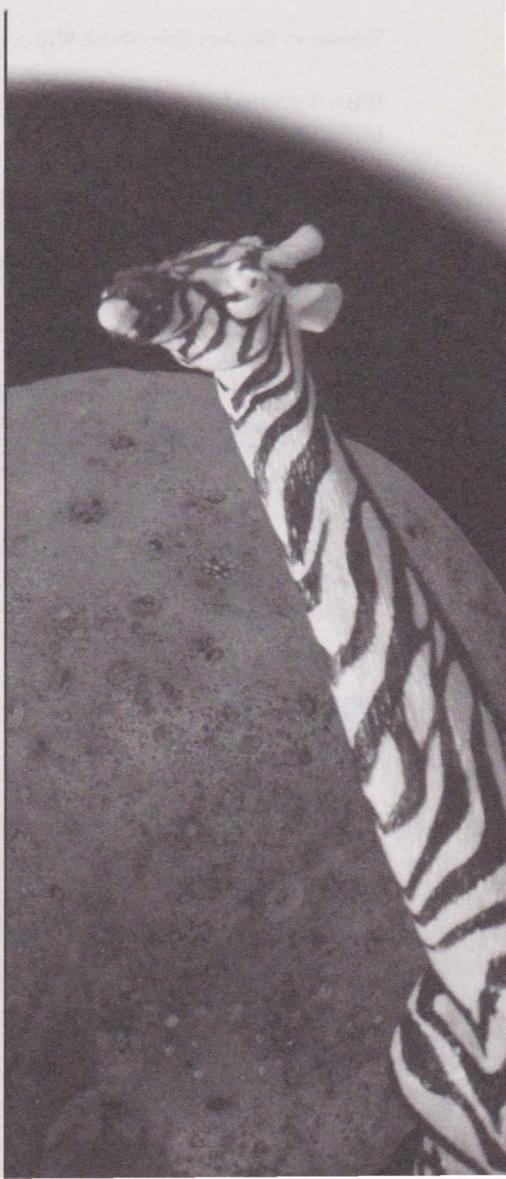
GOING DOWN SWINGING ²⁴

Short Fiction * Poetry

80-page Comics Extravaganza!



GOING DOWN SWINGING ²⁴



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**ARTS
VICTORIA**



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Australian Government



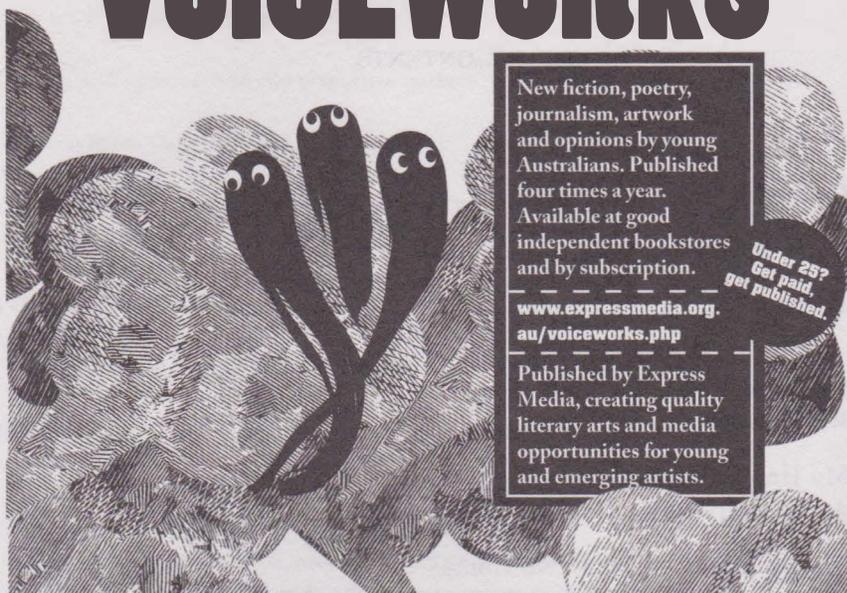
**THREE
TRIPLE
RRR**

Cover image: Detail from diorama *The zebra that changed her mind* by Drasko Boljevic

CONTENTS

Comics & Illustrations	<i>ix</i>
With thanks to... ..	<i>xi</i>
Editorials	<i>xii</i>
Bewitched	
<i>Will Fraser</i>	<i>1</i>
My Hands on the Autobahn	
<i>Anthony Kane Evans</i>	<i>2</i>
Sisters and a 4-hour Drive Home	
<i>Alana Kelsall</i>	<i>4</i>
Asylum (Gk.) Sans (Fr.) Guano (Esp.)	
<i>Jillian Pattinson</i>	<i>5</i>
A Place of Refuge	
<i>Irma Gold</i>	<i>6</i>
In the Tongue of the Tokay Gecko	
<i>Jillian Pattinson</i>	<i>14</i>
Pleading Clumsy	
<i>Tamara Searle</i>	<i>15</i>
Sky Dancer	
<i>Emilie Zoey Baker</i>	<i>16</i>
Ghosts and Working Men	
<i>Scott McDermott</i>	<i>17</i>
Horses	
<i>Andrew Slattery</i>	<i>21</i>

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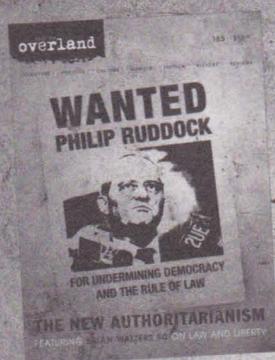
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I Am (So Sick of My Self) or Cinema is Dead (For Godard)	
<i>Klare Lanson</i>	22
Idol	
<i>Jodie Young</i>	24
Chameleon	
<i>Craig Billingham</i>	26
The Buddha	
<i>Nandi Chinna</i>	27
Jack With a Beer Back	
<i>Juleigh Howard-Hobson</i>	28
Road Song for Your Love (For, and to be recited by, the late Barry White)	
<i>Ross Donlon</i>	31
The Legends of Loss	
<i>Leanne Hills</i>	32
The General's Daughter	
<i>Charles D'Anastasi</i>	33
Most People Are Good	
<i>Meera Atkinson</i>	34
Seven: TV in Latin After Pierre Alferi	
<i>Leanne Hills</i>	36
Happiness	
<i>Sarah Holland-Batt</i>	38
Out of Sight	
<i>Vera Di Campli San Vito</i>	39
Historical Similes	
<i>Gigi Thibodeau</i>	40
Requiem for a Restaurant Critic	
<i>Nicholas Rasche</i>	42
Moonkus	
<i>Kevin Gillam</i>	45

MEANJIN
NEW WRITING IN AUSTRALIA

Vol. 65, no. 4, 2006:

The RELIGION issue

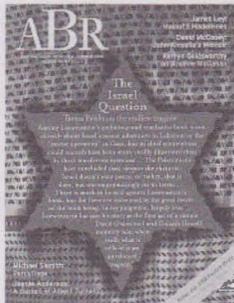
MEANJIN'S new issue focuses on belief (mainly religious), including 'new age' spirituality movements, various forms of fundamentalism, and the relationships of religion with sex and with politics in what might be called our 'post-secular' age. Contributors include **Morag Fraser, Stephen Crittenden, Judith Beveridge, Kevin Hart, Dorothy Porter, Barry Hill, Gillian Bouras, Chris Wallace-Crabbe, Sophie Cunningham, Greg McLaren** and the **Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams**.

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One Hundred Random Cows	
<i>Sean M. Whelan</i>	46
Shrunken Waters	
<i>Colleen Z. Burke</i>	129
Curtin's Legacy	
<i>Katherine Fay</i>	130
Windows	
<i>Sandra Hill</i>	135
Snake Died	
<i>Logan Jones</i>	136
Ode to a Kangaroo	
<i>Mitchell Joe</i>	137
Koala Therapy	
<i>Phil Ilton</i>	138
The Godfather	
<i>Jude Alford</i>	139
Patterdale Farm (1840)	
<i>B.N. Oakman</i>	142
Untitled	
<i>Albert Rotstan</i>	143
May Day Mistaken	
<i>Klare Lanson</i>	144
Ithuriel, Pete & Yehvony	
(From the novel, <i>The Bowl</i>)	
<i>Michael Aiken</i>	146
Morning Sydney Harbour	
<i>Jules Leigh Koch</i>	156
The Emperor's Birthday	
<i>Paul Morgan</i>	157
The Day of My Friend's Colonoscopy	
<i>A.M. Carson</i>	162
Finding Utopia in the New Recreation Complex	
<i>Karen Knight</i>	164

Ecology	
<i>Vera Di Campi San Vito</i>	166
Retreat	
<i>Kieran Carroll</i>	167
Spat Out	
<i>Rohan Wightman</i>	172
What My Face is Saying	
<i>Kris Allison</i>	180
Porn, an Orange and <i>Beverly Hills 90210</i>	
<i>Emilie Zoey Baker</i>	182
Tourist in the Cloister	
<i>Gigi Thibodeau</i>	184
Catfood	
<i>Michael de Valle</i>	185
How to submit to <i>Going Down Swinging</i>	186
Welcome to the <i>GDS Merchandise Tent!</i>	187
Index	188

COMICS & ILLUSTRATIONS

A Comics Haiku	
<i>Leigh Rigozzi</i>	49
Self Stalker	
<i>Paul Oslo Davis</i>	53
Prey	
<i>Gabriel Fua</i>	59
Beaching	
<i>Nicholas Kallincos</i>	67
Intense	
<i>Mandy Ord</i>	68
Sunday Driving	
<i>Andrew Fulton</i>	70
Adam	
<i>Bruce Mutard</i>	71
Exquisite Corks	
<i>Mirranda Burton</i>	72
Well? Did You Tell Him?	
<i>Zackary Blackstone</i>	78
AnticAntic	
<i>Zackary Blackstone</i>	79
Remember Where You Are	
<i>Jo Waite</i>	80
In the Heat of the Moment	
<i>Anna Simic</i>	85
Wrecking Ball Head	
<i>Nicholas Kallincos</i>	86

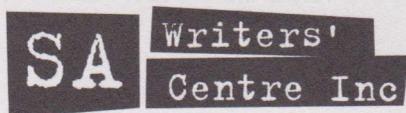
Remain Calm; Await Instructions	
<i>Jo Waite</i>	87
Saved: A Zombie Comic	
<i>Nicki Greenberg</i>	88
Four Mutants	
<i>Anna Simic</i>	92
Tree	
<i>Neale Blanden</i>	93
The Many Moods of Our Leader	
<i>Tim Danko</i>	94
Again and Again	
<i>Mikal Fikaris</i>	101
Toys	
<i>Sarah Louise Badcock</i>	102
Lost	
<i>Clint Cure</i>	108
Trolley Pusher	
<i>Daniel Reed</i>	112
Fireworks	
<i>Glenno</i>	116
The Queen of Sheba's Consort	
<i>Written by Philip Bentley and drawn by Madrid</i>	120
Tee-dee	
<i>Andrew Fulton</i>	124
Proverbs on Loss	
<i>Anthony Woodward</i>	125

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ACT Writers Centre



EDITORIAL I ... STEVE GRIMWADE

EVERY LITTLE ACT of creation amazes me. Each is a small revolution. It whirls, it yells, it states, whispers, laughs, implores: "Destroy what you will. I am able to make things from nought." And it does. (And it seems creation may be our natural state—a conscious nod to change and progress.)

But while this force may be natural and revolutionary, it is only half of this impulse's story. We must remember the limits of ourselves. For creation also says, "I'm here", and thus suggests: you're there. And yes, there you are.

Welcome to *GDS*. Welcome to our machine for capturing acts of creation. We are the little pill that makes you smaller... bigger... brighter... Alone with us all. And what a brave cohort you've found.

My thanks to everyone who's part of our (nuclear, extended and/or dysfunctional) family. Creation is an act that is better shared, and *GDS* is so much better placed to do that with editors like Lisa and Dave. My thanks to them, and to Mandy for bringing the comics together with such joyful, grounded enthusiasm; to Karla for her editorial input and continued support of the indie presses; to Jo, Tim and George for helping along the way; and to all our literary friends in magazines and centres who've supported our efforts. (Let generosity create its own revolution.)

Lastly, my thanks to the creators of work who submitted to *GDS*. Your courage gives us reason to exist. It takes a lot of nerve to put your ideas into a sequence of translatable symbols. (And you don't even have to be overthrowing the state, just your own state.)

We live in a world collapsing in on itself. Luckily the gravity, the fear, doesn't affect all heavenly bodies the same. Our revolution is whirling dervishly, sending our brightest thoughts to the far reaches of Australia, and hopefully the world.

Wherever you live, the writers in this issue of *GDS* are pleading for an engagement with something outside of themselves. By placing their ideas in time they now need you to complete their revolutionary act. So stand up, be counted. Read. Let yourself be read by others. Have a conversation with the world. Create.

—Steve Grimwade

EDITORIAL II ... LISA GREENAWAY

STORIES ARE CAPTURED pieces of time. Reading a story, you can progress through a period of a few minutes, a few days, or years. You can travel with a character through their whole lifetime, in the space of a few hours' reading. You can take a trip through decades, centuries—you can even travel backwards.

Writers are time travellers, their stories and their poems, time-catchers—in their hands like deftly-wielded butterfly nets.

And we, the editors of *GDS*, are really just the collectors—nailing them down on the page and putting them on display.

That makes us sound like evil bastards, I know, nailing the lovely butterflies down... but I'd rather think of us as sentimental collectors, working for the love of the object, delicately handling the treasures we've found... like crazed little men in the basement burning the midnight oil, stretching the wings over the boards so that the colours catch the light...

Speaking of crazed little men in the basement—I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the tireless energy of Steve Grimwade, who has made the seemingly impossible possible, and made real this mad dream of putting out two editions of *GDS* in a year.

Not only have we managed it but we've put out what I think are two very powerful collections in 2006. With some masterful time travellers at work and—I'm happy to say—not one time waster amongst them.

This time around we've caught ourselves some very rare and precious specimens indeed, with the help of master butterfly catchers David Prater and Mandy Ord.

Courtesy of Mandy, a whole new world—the world of the comic and the cartoon—has been opening up before my eyes. Comics capture time in a very peculiar way. The artist works so meticulously, drawing and redrawing characters recognisable from frame to frame. They control our eye so cleverly, leading us where they want us to go, arresting us, grabbing us, speeding things up, then suddenly stopping everything to focus us in on the point or the punch line. And all through a silent, two-dimensional drawing.

This is time travelling at its very best.

—Lisa Greenaway

EDITORIAL III ... DAVID PRATER

THIS IS MY FIRST issue as an editor of *Going Down Swinging*.

It's been a wild ride.

First, the submissions. I have to admit I was amazed and then slightly frightened by the sheer number (and quality) of submissions we received this year. This just confirms for me how many people are out there writing crazy poems, drawing kooky comics and coming up with surreal and interesting storylines. I hope you'll agree that this 24th issue of *Going Down Swinging* is as strong, if not stronger than any issue of any magazine that's ever been published. Anywhere.

Second, the editorial process. This is the first time I've ever worked closely with a group of fellow-editors and let me tell you, the *GDS* editorial meetings are barnstorming affairs, where the seemingly impossible task of selecting a book's worth of content from thousands of submissions takes on epic proportions. I'd like to be able to say that these meetings were full of tears, tantrums and tie-breaks but the truth is, working with Steve and Lisa has been a fantastic experience.

Third, the comics. *GDS* has featured comic art before but I believe this is the biggest and best selection of comic art I've ever seen. Anywhere. Huge props to our comics editor Mandy Ord for her work in soliciting work from some very exciting artists. It was hugely exciting to sit down and look through the work, and while the task of selecting the best pieces was just as hard as it was for the poetry and prose, I think we've achieved the right balance.

Fourth, the contributors. That's you. I know, you may not have got into this issue but the fact of the matter is that *GDS* would not exist were it not for the writers, the poets, the geni (you know it). The artists, cartoonists, haikunauts and rhymesters. The readers and supporters of the mag. Yes, you. We love you all. Believe me, I have been you. I may not know you in the way Henry Rollins says he does but then who would want to, really?

Finally, the book itself. I mean, how cool is this book? From the cover to the layout and the bumper comics section (some of it in colour!), this issue oozes professionalism and quality. Quality! The world's crying out for it! Thanks to Steve and his incredible production skills, that's just what you get. In bucket-loads. I'm proud to have had even a small hand in bringing this issue to life. I'm left wondering how *GDS* can get any better.

Well, the big news is that *Going Down Swinging* is now bi-annual! This means you have twice as many chances to be published in Australia's coolest, funkier and most untold literary periodical!

So get cracking!

—David Prater

EDITORIAL IV ... MANDY ORD

I REMEMBER WHEN I first started to meet comic folk. Kirrily rode up beside me on her bike one day and introduced me to underground comic books. Stashing the books in my bag I rode home to my backyard where I sat quietly with a cup of tea and opened them up. In my hands was what felt like a living breathing thing. It struck out at me with the intensity of its energy and it was as real to me as the sun on my back and the grass under my bare feet. My mind was stamped with the beauty of the pictures and engulfed within the rolling waves of story and dialogue. I wondered to myself how something so silent could be so loud. The comics seemed to curse the sky with their angry outbursts and for this they did not apologise. They were obscene, hilarious, disturbing and sincere. They spoke tenderly to me and whispered sweet truths of the everyday and the ordinary. They were wild and crazy and they didn't give a shit about what anyone thought. I think it was love at first sight. It was soon evident that I was not alone. As letters were pulled out of my postbox and later emails out of my computer, I realised that Australia has a very real and very passionate comic community. As the practice of creating comics often requires long stints of isolation, to find like-minded people was a revelation and a relief. Some of the folk in these pages I have known for quite some time and some I have only just met. I feel that their fine work speaks volumes and I am sure they will speak volumes to you as well. In terms of my involvement in this issue of *Going Down Swinging* thank you Steve, Lisa and David for your warmth and guidance.

—Mandy Ord

Bewitched

Will Fraser

She
was soft to touch
but
hard to define

He
was hard to love
but
easy to please

Together
they formed
a
perfect hologram.

My Hands on the Autobahn

Anthony Kane Evans

SOMETIMES, WHILST DRIVING, I look down at my hands on the wheel, idling there. I wonder: if I remove them from that aesthetically displeasing wheel, will it make any difference?

“Frank, do you think it’ll make any difference if I remove my hands from the wheel?” I ask.

Frank looks at my hands, looks at the surface of my eyes, looks at the straight road ahead, this never-ending German motorway, this autobahn. We are alone on the motorway for as far as the eye can see. If I open the window, which I won’t, we might hear some birds, tweeting, or whatever they do around these parts.

“No,” Frank says.

I look at my hands. Suddenly they don’t look like my hands anymore. They look like somebody sewed them on, they look kind of too big.

“Frank, whatever happened to my artistic hands, what am I doing wearing these... these lumberjack’s hands for?”

Frank looks at my hands, looks at the surface of my eyes, looks at the straight road ahead.

“There’s a motorway café coming up, why don’t we take a break?”

In the car park I accost a German as he’s getting into his car. He’s an elderly man.

“Whatever happened to your poets?” I ask.

“Bitte?”

“Whatever happened to your poets?” I repeat.

Frank takes hold of my arm and steers me into the cafe. He sits me down. Orders a couple of coffees and two halves of chicken. I don't want

chicken, I hate to see the corpse of a chicken after I've eaten it. I mean, the bones, the almost burnt skin. I don't want to use my hands to eat that chicken.

"Is that why you ordered chicken, so I'd use my hands?" I ask Frank.

"Oh, so they're *your* hands again, now, are they?"

I look down at them. They do look more normal now. Now that we are off that motorway. I stand up.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going out to listen to the birds while the chicken cooks."

"Alright," Frank says.

Sisters and a 4-hour Drive Home

Alana Kelsall

our childhood our fifties our Bobby Darin our Gene Pitney
our posters our records our cigarettes our beehives
our evening dresses our stilettos our bunions our arthritis
our veins our stretchmarks our fibro our glaucoma
our moods our flushes our weight our drinking
our husbands our kids our childhood our horses
our mother our father our hugs our goodbyes
our letters *Your mother and I Your father and I*
it's all for the best always make the best of it
our report cards our coming home our crying our whispering
Stop that inane giggling our silences our lies
our gloves our hats our pimples our periods
our bras our suspenders our tampons our Modess
our mother our Portland our suntans our boring life
our invites what Mum said who's a Catholic who isn't
our lies our phone calls who's done it who hasn't
our hairspray our shaving our plucking our pills
I hate women—not one brain between the lot of them
our boyfriends our hangovers our driving our drinking
our demos our Vietnam our call up our brother
our burning our bras our change the world
our leaving home our leaving the country our casualties our peace
our moving back our let me go our rock and roll our ticking clock
our parties our drinking our boyfriends our husbands
our mortgages our kids our best our worst
our phone calls our mother our Vicks our friars' balsam
a daughter is yours forever
our worrying our drinking our fears our menopause our calling home
calling home calling home

Asylum (Gk.) Sans (Fr.) Guano (Esp.)

Jillian Pattinson

Spoken word of the pan-Asiatic mynah
—queue-jumping interloper—
leaves these home-grown birds for dead.
What guts! What gusto! What fluency and flavour—
bringing every lingo from Babylon to the subcontinent
into range of hearing
(just short of understanding.)

Spontaneous, inspired and entirely improvised
—island hopping down the archipelago—
shameless, needy, full of fight.
What front! What gall! What insult and injury.
This song—the stuff of a standing ovation—
falls on deaf ears
(excised beyond comprehension.)

A Place of Refuge

Irma Gold

WHEN I ARRIVE I don't want to go inside. I stop the car a little distance away and a puff of red dust licks at my arms through the open window. After the engine's chatter slips away there's no sound. No wind, no movement of animals, nothing. It's as if I've sunk into a padded sound booth. I feel like I'm in a place I've no right to be. A place that belongs only to itself. And for a minute I'm almost certain that I'm seeing some kind of bizarre mirage. In every direction there's just brilliant red dirt and low-lying green scrub bleached a dull olive. A horizon that runs a loop around me. A sky like an ocean about to fall on my head. And then that. It's as if the whole place was picked up by a tornado and flung here.

There's five fences between me and them. The last a row of giant steel toothpicks with ringlets of razor wire stuck to them. My legs feel sloshy, as if I'm the one who's going in and not coming out. I tell myself I'm being stupid, and I force my foot onto the accelerator.

The boss sits behind his desk tumbled with papers. His name is displayed on a gold plate—Graham Meehan, Director, Woomera Detention Centre—but the office reveals nothing else about him. No family photos, nothing decorative save for a faded Constable print that's all clouds. He doesn't talk straight away. He leans back slightly in his chair and his greasy comb-over flops forward into one eyebrow. As he pushes it back I notice the long delicate hairs sprouting from each finger. When he does speak his voice is scratchy, too high-pitched to command respect.

"Don't get involved," he tells me, and there's threat in his tone. "They'll try to take advantage of you at every opportunity. Just do your job, keep your head down."

The first time I see him I'm wearing baggy green socks. My face is bare of make-up and my hair is fastened with bobby pins. I realise when he walks in that I feel ugly.

He, on the other hand, is not. There is a cut on his forearm, from a fall he says. The desert is collecting in the wound. Fine red dust in blood against skin so black as to be almost charcoal.

Even though he doesn't know me he speaks to me softly, as if I am a respected friend. He tells me he's from Sudan. That his name is Juma. His English is like a carefully-paced song, lapping around me.

I bandage his arm and he thanks me. There is something about him; I don't want him to leave. I ask him if he would like some chocolate. He considers me carefully, then says yes. I pull a slim bar of Dove out of my pocket and snap it in half. I hand him one stick and nibble at the other. The taste is slippery in my mouth and I make some abstract noise of pleasure. He smiles. For a moment it is as if we could be meeting anywhere. In the street, at a bowling alley, hunched in a beery pub. He's so beautiful I could kiss him. Right now. But I don't, of course. It's his eyes, saggy with despair, that remind me where we stand.

It's only my fourth day when a boy is brought to me. Mick, the guard, tells me he's smashed his head with a rock until it gouged out flesh and blood ran into his eyes. He's only ten.

"Where did he get the rock?"

"Some of the Iranians have been smashing the brick building with posts."

Mick pushes a hand through his hair in a way that is almost lazy. He pulls a pack of Marlboro Reds from his pocket and flicks the lighter at a cigarette trapped between his teeth. His body is obscenely fat—a soft fat that's settled into itself and grown comfy. I feel irritated. I don't ask why the Iranians weren't stopped.

When I move to clean the wounds the boy screams, "Don't touch me! Don't touch me!"

His eyes are big and round. My niece Georgia has eyes the same mottled, hazel colour. I have a photo of her stuck to my fridge at home with a dolphin magnet. It was taken at her ninth birthday party. She's mid-bounce on a jumping castle, her flossy pink fairy dress flying up over her hips. The camera has caught her at just the right moment—a look of glorious uncomplicated delight on her face.

That night sleep is a holey thing. I dream of playgrounds stuffed full of children. Little limbs wedged into tunnels and ladders. I wake early in a sweat.

I'm sitting in the office reading a book wrapped inside a folio of documents, just in case Meehan decides to visit. The fan's fighting the thick heat that folds everything in to itself. It tickles the corners of my pages.

"What are you reading?"

I startle, but it's only Juma.

"Oh hi there," I say. "It's Barbara Cartland."

I feel pink rising from my throat and hope he's never heard of her.

"Do you read?"

"A little," he says. "I never went to school, but there was this old woman I lived with for a few years. She taught me English. To read it too, but I'm not very good."

"I could lend you some books. Not this one though," I say quickly, feeling pink meet my cheeks in a hot burst.

"Yes," he says. "Something other than the text books would be good."

"Surely you can't be sick of reading about Sam and Julie asking where the toilet is?" I say jokily.

We both laugh harder than my lame attempt at humour warrants, and it feels good.

Today an Afghani woman, Aesha, comes to me. She kneels at my feet and begs me to help her get a visa. Her face is soggy with tears and snot, and all I can say is, "I can't help you, I'm sorry, I can't help you."

She wails in this way that slices into me and she pulls out a razor blade. She starts slashing at her wrists. I grab for it and it opens me too before Mick shoves her to the floor and pulls her arms behind her back. He looks me dead in the eyes.

"Don't let her get to you," he says coldly.

In this moment I see clearly how his compassion has left him. When the woman is gone I examine the blood-filled grooves on my palm, like rivers on a map. I tell myself I don't ever want to be like Mick.

I leave work at six. Driving out is always a relief. I feel the muscles in my shoulders relax. I snap the radio on and Britney Spears jumps out. I crank it up so my car is a box of sound. I sing with her so loudly my voice cracks.

At home I discard my bag by the door and head straight for the kitchen. As I'm making tea I unexpectedly crumple. My body loses itself and I have to sit down on the floor to stop myself collapsing. I want to cry and empty it all out, but I can't.

I don't sleep that night. I sit with my knees hooked under my chin and watch infomercials until the sky starts to bloom. Aesha and Juma and

that big-eyed boy are swimming in my head and they won't get out. I feel wound tight as a Jack-in-the-Box.

One dusty wind-whipped Sunday I dig out old posters from the dark corners of my wardrobe and wipe dust, restoring them to bright splash. Then on Monday morning I travel round the world with Juma. The posters are slick rainbow-puddled colour on the nondescript walls. There's one of Machu Piccu and my fingers trickle over it as I tell Juma that I want to go there, I want to stand in its templed calm and feel my smallness. But Juma is more interested in Australia. In the coralled jewellery of the Barrier Reef and the brashness of Surfers.

"What is it like?" he asks, looking at beach and bodies shiny with sun.

"Garish," I say.

He looks confused.

"Loud and big and all colour," I say. "Anything goes. It's a cool place."

I'm in my kitchen, music pumping. A cracked packet of flour has snowed across the floor and there are dirty wooden spoons, beaters and bowls everywhere. But I'm happy. I'm baking a cake for the first time, poring over Delia Smith and carefully reading each instruction twice. I waste a lot of eggs. Yolks keep slipping into the whites, but I eventually manage a gelatinous mass that's only streaked orange in three places. I beat, I fold, I dip my finger in deep. It's chocolate. Light and fluffy as if it's been pumped full of bubbles. The icing is wicked. I snap off hard little squares of chocolate and melt it with a large plop of butter.

Once it's in the oven I get nervous. I check my watch every five minutes and skewer it three times. Eventually it's sitting proudly on a newly bought cooling rack, tendrils of steam trumpeting success.

I drive it into the compound like a newborn baby. I take corners at ten k and even on the roads free of ruts I don't exceed forty.

He's not expecting it, of course. He doesn't even know I've found this information. I set everything up while one of the guards fetches him. Lights off, candles on. When he walks in I start singing. My voice sounds weedy and I don't want to keep going, but I do.

His face is framed in a blaze of fire, full of smile. I've never seen Juma like that. It's a smile that hugs his eyes.

The detainees are hunger striking. It's been going on a week and Juma has been coming to see me everyday. Usually he just sits quietly in the corridor and watches me work, but today there's a lull and we stand side-by-side, striped by unnatural light. His body lolls with dehydration. We don't touch and we don't really talk, but we're soaked in a stillness that weaves us together.

At one point I ask him about home, his home. He dips his head, shakes it slowly.

"The future, then," I say, determined.

"Ah, the future," he says quietly, and goes silent.

A ragged blush crashes into my face. I feel so stupid.

My brain frantically trips over itself trying to work out the right thing to say but Mick gatecrashes my thoughts. He winks at me. His eyelid is a spillage of skin.

"You right, mate?" he says to me. I nod and wish he'd leave. He looks disinterestedly at Juma.

"You need any food or water?"

Juma looks him straight in the eye.

"I need freedom."

Mick laughs at him. It is a hollow laugh.

"I can give you food and water, that's all."

"I will wait for freedom."

Mick lights a cigarette and trails smoke behind him down the corridor. Juma is grave and suddenly distant. I want to touch him, but the space between us has fractured.

It's a Sunday afternoon and I'm slumped into the couch with popcorn and Mark Philippoussis. It's the Davis Cup finals and it's nail-bitingly good. It's the pleasurable agony of a five-setter, and I'm shouting at the tele and disputing line calls like a fledgling McEnroe.

We win, of course, and the Aussie boys all pounce on each other back slapping and hollering. Mark gets hoisted onto their shoulders and the grins are so big you couldn't wipe them off with a steamroller. And I'm sitting there, alone, grinning wildly too.

They parade about with the trophy, sweat-smearing and giddy-eyed, and then it's the serious stuff. The speeches are pretty dreary but then our anthem gets played—in France—and you can see the Aussies filling up with pride. And suddenly the tears are finding their way out of my eyes too. Not because of the tennis, or these young men, but because I've heard the words, really heard them for the first time. *For those who've come across the seas, we've boundless plain to spare.*

I'm scrunched into an armchair in just a bra and undies. My clothes lie balled up on the floor, yanked off me like dead skin straight after walking through the door. I'm watching the news. I don't know why. It makes me feel like smashing something.

Meehan is hard-lining again. The hunger striking has them all in defence mode. He's talking about due process and entitlement and not succumbing to pressure. It's strange seeing him come out of the TV. It's my world they're showing but it doesn't seem real. He makes it seem fair, reasonable, necessary.

I shut Meehan down and go to stand by the window. Dusk is settling into a purposeful pink. The window is floor to ceiling and someone might see me, but strangely I'm not even thinking about that. I walk outside. I take off my undies, bra. I fold them neatly and lie on the ground. I am completely still, my body straight. Gritty pebbles press into me. Above me pink dies and leaves behind a thick bruise. Ants start using me as a highway. Purposefully following my shin, circling my knee, climbing towards my hip bone. I don't care.

There are protestors camped outside. A bunch of them arrived last night but this morning a stream of buses have been divesting themselves of people. It's now a village of tents and guitars and boots and megaphones and loud signs plastered with FREE THE REFUGEES. Driving past them into the compound I feel like the enemy. I'm just doing my job, I feel like shouting. Mick reckons there are at least five hundred of them. They've even got a block of portaloos and a water truck and a media centre on wheels. From the window I nervously watch police and reporters and camera men dance among the gaggle of protestors.

The place is pricked with tension. The detainees' talk bubbles over everything. Emotions are at maximum volume. We are all just waiting for something to happen. And when it does it's as if we're smacked sideways by a truck that arrives out of nowhere.

It starts simply enough. Just before dusk the protestors march on the centre, shouting slogans, megaphone happy. There's a jumble of detainees at the fence. I can hear their raw voices, pummelled with anger, screaming things like "we not animals", and some of the protestors are buckling with tears. I can't understand why the guards don't bring the detainees inside, and why there are so few police on the other side.

The protestors start shaking the first perimeter fence and suddenly it's melting away under their hands. And the second. And the third. From the window I see their faces—surprise-slapped—as whoops puncture the air. It happens so quickly it's all just a chaotic blur. The fourth is bent open with poles. And detainees start frantically scrambling up the fifth. I see Juma among them and I feel as if I've been punched in the chest. His body

is fighting with the razor wire and there's red on his skin and then he falls onto the other side. And he's swallowed up by protestors.

The escapees are brought back one by one through the night and into the next day. Every time I check if it is Juma, and every time it is not. I feel jagged. I don't know whether to be happy or sad. I lift in and out of each emotion. I picture him soaking freedom up through his skin. I picture him dead in the dust.

There are rumours some of them escaped through the desert. We have the tele permanently prattling. On the news I am struck by this boy, a uni student, with tanned skin and a leather wristband. He looks straight down the lens.

"You know it was all so impromptu," he says. "We didn't mean to do it. It just kind of happened."

The guards are lashing out. Every soundbite shoves them up another notch. I don't feel as if I belong with them. The detainees are being locked in their dongas and subjected to headcounts at any time of the day or night. Some of them have been drilled in. This afternoon I had to fetch one of the guards to use an electric drill to open one of the dongas so I could treat a man inside. I miss Juma.

I'm catching up on paperwork one afternoon when Mick comes in, plonks himself down in the seat opposite me.

"Got some news," he says.

He's looking at me carefully and there's a softness in his eyes that I've never seen before. Suddenly my breath is jumpy.

"Just spoken to Meehan. They've caught the last of the detainees and some of them are being transferred direct to Port Headland."

We both know what he's really telling me. He reaches his hand tentatively towards me, pats my hand uncomfortably.

"Sorry mate," he says. "Just thought you'd want to know."

The weeks drag their feet like an old horse. I feel so very tired all the time. And then there's a shattering: Mick brings me coffee made all wrong, and a boy.

"I think he's been, you know, um, interfered with."

"By who?" I ask.

My voice is pinched tight. Mick shrugs. He's not telling.

"But I think it might have been more than once. You know, it might have been a few times."

There's a threat in his eyes warning me off.

"Where's his parents?"

"Don't know. He's unaccompanied."

Mick leaves us alone. The boy stands slumped into himself close to the wall. His fingers are twitching. I squat down in front of him and try to tell him that he's safe now, that I'll get him out. I don't know how much he understands.

I call for Meehan and explain. He says not to worry. He'll deal with it. He takes the boy into another room with a detainee who can speak his language.

I sink into a chair and type up the incident report. I feel as if my insides have been set into a hard mould. When he comes back I hand it to him. He reads it, repeatedly pushing back the flap of his hair. When he finishes his hairy fingers rip it up. He brusquely tells me I've got it wrong.

I feel anger rush out of me like a burst fire hydrant.

"He must be removed," I say. My voice is scratchy, ready to be snapped.

"He must be taken to the hospital and seen by a doctor there."

I can feel myself losing my grip but I don't cry. My face is all angles. There's ice in my eyes, but it makes no difference. I walk away.

I'm sitting on the verandah eating banana sandwiches and sucking milky coffee through the gap in my front teeth. I'm wearing a tank top that's so old it's wilting. But it's comfy and I like its bleached blue; like ice and oceans and trundling rivers, things you miss out here.

Strips of bark dangle like sleeping snakes from the eucalypts, and I watch them sway gently, thinking about how good it feels to be running from this place. My bags are packed, waiting in the hallway. There's no job to go to, but there's Auntie May in Lochsport and a pink weatherboard house and a beach to lose myself in.

The postman pulls up on his squeaky bike and hands me a postcard. I wave to him as he wiggles off down the street. On the card there's a picture of a beach with two palm trees along a sidewalk. It's one of those really poor reproductions where the colours are leery and everything's slightly fuzzy. It's got GREETINGS FROM SURFERS PARADISE stamped on a corner in hot pink.

I turn it over. The address is a fragment: Alison McPherson, Woomera, and a smile tweaks the corner of my mouth, for the bold hope of it. As for the message it's just one word printed neatly in bold capitals: FREEDOM.

And when I read that word, that simple black-inked word, a grin gatecrashes my face and refuses to leave.

In the Tongue of the Tokay Gecko

Jillian Pattinson

Because he adores her, he longs to be near her,
but her clever head and deft slim hands
seem preoccupied with books, instruments,
observations, rocks and reptiles. Wholly engaged
in the concise naming of endangered species,
she simply has no time for homo sapiens.
Recognising that the only sure way to her heart
is through her work, he takes up the freckled skin
of the Tokay Gecko, quickly coming to grips
with the sensitive tip of each elongated finger.
Eyes scintillating through the fine distortion
of transparent lids, he rapid flicks his sure-fire tongue
over everything she touches. He stalks the dark
with a fierce *tok-tok*, warning dust
and shadows off this hallowed skin.
That he has given up his manhood matters
not, to him. And she? Head in a book,
quite oblivious to the fact that she has him
eating out of her hand, his wild heart
wildly beating. Ipso facto, she has him
at his wit's end. Abstracted, she watches
this unusually tame specimen chastising
his own shadow and crawling up the walls
of her sanctum sanctorum. All day he dreams of her,
then observes her dreaming through the night,
awake with stumpy-tailed longing.
And the mosquitos that trouble her sleep?—
each, to him, a chalice of consummate love,
the Eucharist that blends her blood with his.
Gek-gek! Gek-gek! He barks out his desire—first
an impassioned outburst, melding obscure dialects
of Malay with coastal trade calls, he then resorts
to the formal inflections of textbook Greek,
begging her to join the Gekkonidae as his bride.

Pleading Clumsy

Tamara Searle

Against her arm
Slip, slips his arm through air
Slips, his arm and hers brush
Must not, must not blush, skips her heart
Basking in slippages

Sky Dancer

Emilie Zoey Baker

The sky dancer at the car wash looks like Annie Lennox.
She waves like a drunk tree.
One long tube with arms
filled with hot, hot air
flailing about, attracting customers.
Fluttering like there's a multitude of angels, playing with her heart.

She bends back slowly in the limbo position
then with a burst of spine breeze
she snaps forward
rising up
like a celebrity ghost.
Her make up is hard and her hair is cropped.
Her arms dance, *come to the carwash!*
Then she droops forward,
like it's the end of the 80s all over again.
She stays there awhile, shimmying alone.
But then pulls up and reaches for her sweet, sweet dreams.

Ghosts and Working Men

Scott McDermott

THE PUB IS HOT with bodies and brings the stink out of him like new. The shifts inside oil tanks leave Bartlett coated in a muck that refuses to be scrubbed away. Smudges of grime cover the glass that all but disappears inside his big, oily palm.

The talk around him is loud and insistent but his mind is captive to a Zen riddle and none of it registers. He doesn't know shit about Zen or Buddha, or any of those slanty-eyed religions, but he knows what a Zen riddle is: one hand clapping and all that shit.

Across the room The Fidget shouts a round. The pay packet from which he draws a twenty bears a name that isn't his. Its rightful owner doesn't exist, except as a name on a roster. The Fidget is one of the ghosts: men you won't see between paydays. It's an open secret. Better for the company to part with the extra wages and have the work done than not have it done at all. So the ghosts get paid like those that work. They take their cut and kick the rest along to the union. If The Fidget has a real name, nobody seems to know it. He is just The Fidget: a small, twitchy boy that grew into a small, twitchy man.

The pub is a payday obligation. Sweating jugs are pushed at you to refresh your glass quicker than you can empty it. The dockers have the run of the place. Any other bloke that wanders in by mistake doesn't stay long.

Whelan's kid is selling the skirt behind the bar on the idea that if you look close at the sleeve of *Exile on Main Street* you can see him in one of the photos. She asks whether he's the one with golf balls in his mouth. He says he thinks they might be eggs but, anyway, that's not him. The kid is all lank hair and attitude and doesn't know when to shut up. Anywhere else he'd get his head punched in. He's Whelan's kid though, so that's not going to happen. Whelan is the union welfare officer and takes up the col-

lections for the old blokes and the sick. Touch his kid though and he'd send you to the emergency room. Then he'd send flowers to your wife.

Bartlett's father was also a docker, crawling over and into the great steel hulls that berth at Webb Dock as Bartlett does now. He attaches an importance to this that his wife, understanding though she is, cannot appreciate. She is distrustful and more than a little scared of the men that work the docks. She knows better than to call them criminals and couches her reservations in softer terms. They're a rough bunch, she says, and she is right. The docks attract men with histories. His father had spent time inside and on his release only the docks would have him. The docks give a man a second chance when no-one else will. It takes discipline though to make good on the opportunity and those that fail are in good company.

The Fidget wears Bartlett's gaze like sandpaper and is trying to empty his beer to leave. When a bloke fills your glass you don't leave it half drunk. This is understood. His eyes dart around the room and his skinny frame courses nervous energy.

Bartlett catches a whiff of himself. He stinks bad. He doesn't mind the work though; there's satisfaction in the stiffness he stretches from his back and arms in the early mornings when he rises from beside his sleeping wife. Better to work and be clear of any obligation to the union men who can tap you on the shoulder and offer you a place around the pay truck while working days become your own. He knows better than to look upon ghosting as a free ride. It is a due paid on your loyalty and any occasional service this might require.

The Fidget is among the devoted soldiers of the current union administration and a handy triggerman despite all appearances. A fortnight ago a page three story ran under the headline: SHOTGUN PAIR FOUND IN SCRUB; the muted chatter of the working men pegged The Fidget as the shooter.

What would Hawkey make of the docks? His halftone likeness stares out from a newspaper left on the bar. Robert James Lee Hawke is approaching three years into his term as President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions. Defender of workers' rights, Rhodes Scholar and yard-glass champion, he is a superhero by any Australian standard. There are places however that even superheroes know are best avoided. Kryptonite places.

Outside, the after-work traffic has reached its peak and begins to recede. Drink has taken hold of Whelan's kid and he leans across the bar, making a grab for the tits that billow from the barmaid's lean frame. She pours him another at no charge and tells him to enjoy it because he'll be leaving afterward. She's dealt with worse than him before.

The shotgun pair found dead were Jimmy the Louse and his defacto, Teresa Mitchell. The Louse wasn't unexpected. He was a talker who would pin you down at the pub and fill your ears without let-up, pumping you full of chatter that would turn you to liquid nonsense inside your own skin. He wanted to be liked and with him it was pathological. What he knew and who he might tell put the wrong people on edge. Nobody was surprised that he met his end with a hole in him—but he should've died alone.

The Fidget downs the remainder of his pot at a gulp and belches the gas into a closed mouth, hissing it through his nostrils. He inclines his head toward the door, signalling his intent to those around him. He nods a few goodbyes and is gone. Those he has left behind shake their heads and wheel their conversation in the direction of his shadow.

The Louse was fair game but the Mitchell girl should have been left out of it. This too is understood. You could mete out what violence a man was due but the price he paid was his alone. The Fidget knew that. Maybe she wasn't supposed to be there when he blasted a hole in The Louse. Maybe she got a good look at him; good enough to ID him. But he knew the rules and he did something stupid anyway and all the excuses in the world wouldn't help him now.

Bartlett gets out the door and is grateful for the cooler air. He breathes it deeply. He knew the girl. Not well; hardly at all. Not as a woman anyway. Her old man and his were mates. They worked the docks together and built the houses they each lived in.

Old man Mitchell had outlived his friend by several decades. Bartlett himself was ten when a heart attack stole his father. The union put money in their pocket, saw the house paid off and school fees met. But until Bartlett was of an age to assume the responsibilities of the man of the house it was Mitchell who was there to support the family as if his own. He saw that their lawns were mowed and their house maintained and, as far as it was in his power, that none of them wanted for anything.

For some time now though Mitchell has been an entry in Whelan's log of names—a list of old and infirm dockers, the bedridden and the ill. The union looks after its old men regardless of what factional allegiances they might have held before. All are equal when the years catch up, and the union shares among them such money as can be raised from their membership for the purpose. The old man can't even stand to piss anymore.

Someone from The Louse's camp would sort The Fidget or make the attempt. From that Bartlett takes no comfort. He wants the old man to know that the price The Fidget pays is for his daughter; that she is not

simply incidental to a score settled for another. The idea has gnawed at him and acceptance of what he must do feels like a burden lifted.

Dusk has settled into place over flaking paint and overgrown gardens. Battered cars wait patiently for rust to have its way. A cool breeze raises small bumps on his arms. The place he catches The Fidget is not private but nor is it the type of neighbourhood inclined to share its secrets. At the hand on his shoulder The Fidget turns but there is little he can do to stop the blade that plunges into his gut. He looks down to where a fist is held against him, the blade buried to the hilt. Blood blossoms into the fabric of his shirt.

Bartlett leans into him and speaks quietly into his ear. "This is for the girl," he says.

The Fidget looks up into the face of his assailant and the blade is drawn across his throat. It takes him a moment to fall as if his own death is something beyond comprehension.

Bartlett squats over the body and wipes the blood from his knife. He checks The Fidget's pockets for a wallet or something that might identify him. There is only the pay packet that belongs to a man that never was. Again the riddle starts to loop inside his skull. If you kill a man who doesn't exist, is it really murder?

One hand clapping and all that shit.

Horses

Andrew Slattery

Today there are horses bolting
out of the sun, towards us
in a snort of black heat.
Close your eyes and the likeness

of a sun remains somewhere, there
in the dark of your brain-eye, rising
in diagonals, the broken orange ring hangs
like a blacksmith's glowing horseshoe.

All day the horses rushing out of the sun,
jostles of knocking legs throng forward—
it's a force enough to impress on the eye.
Night, and the image fades out. Open

your eyes and look across the black sky
as a thousand stars rise in diagonals,
and out of each come the horses
and the tiny night suns spot your open eye.

**I Am (So Sick of My Self) or Cinema is Dead
(For Godard)**

Klare Lanson

I am an angel with a metaphrase
 reviewing this world on cue
a cherub of the Metaphysical group
 possessing no real sense of the new
 I show symptomatic signs
 of the broken mind I have the
 scent of death negating what's left
of the social equations which are
 written in powder and steel
 fascinating the networks
 who spy across my interior landscape
with their maps of psycho geography
I am a hybrid of flesh and technology
a biological inkblot for your fantasy

I travel the ocean of cinematic
 information pulsing digital
 rhythmic grey
 strobing towards a cloudy today
I speak through the aperture of the media
I am a virtual woman my body is the property
 of medicine of my lovers of my parents
 of the government's legislation
 lining my pockets with leaves
from a book I cannot fathom

I am a parade
I travel with bells and whistles
on a float destined for the society
of the spectacle I am a life without
consciousness I am an icon of
right wing dreams of the perfect
brain dead and passive neurologically
devastated with success balloons deflated
I am the living projection of your morality

so when they bow
down to you with such reverence
it is perhaps worth remembering
you were not necessarily the chosen one
just the one who wasn't
eliminated

Chameleon

Craig Billingham

I would like to stop changing colour.

I would like to settle in this tree

and see out the hour, the day,

the four seasons being green,

green on green, green on maple leaf,

green against the mud and snow.

I would like to shun your limelight

and stay my deepest shade of green,

stay green when leopards havoc my home.

The Buddha

Nandi Chinna

I'm not really the Buddha
I was made in a factory
by a woman who lives
in a squat in Shenzhen

now I sit
on a laminex table
in a sun-filled room
where people eat slow breakfasts
and read newspapers
sometimes
when they are sad
they light a candle and incense
and place flowers at my feet

but I'm not really the Buddha
I'm just a piece of resin
that absorbs the sunlight
through the north facing window.

Jack With a Beer Back

Juleigh Howard-Hobson

“ALRIGHT. MAYBE A BAR was the worst place in the world for me to be at that point. It was late, real late, and there were only shambling bar wrecks there. And me. Me, with a Modern Lit paper hanging over my head—remember, I was actively striving toward a degree back then—and no idea, no idea at all how to do it. Except that I figured on doing Kerouac or Fitzgerald because I liked drinking.

“So I got to talking to Kevin, the barkeeper, about it. Mostly about Kerouac and how it was impossible to know the real man from the lines of all the books and biographies. I railed against the biographies in particular. Telling Kevin about how they were written in such adulatory states that all the grit of the man seemed to be cleaned away and replaced with some sani-clean aura that no longer smelled of old kitchen tables and benzedrine sweat.

“I was really adamant about it. As adamant as a half drunk sophomore can get. Drunks shuffled by. More beers came and this guy sat down across from me.”

I waited a moment. For effect.

“He didn't look like much to me. Big homespun face, boilermaker slack, hanging pale and vaguely ham-like above an old faded red-flannel shirt. His hands were swollen, his eyes were sort of half shut. He looked like every hero of every Bukowski poem ever written. He leaned over the table that divided us—an old, beery, dinged-up wooden table with the shellac coming off—and he whispered:

“I am the grit that lies in all the gutters of all the streets that sprawl crazy over the earth. I am the old beer and creepy graveyard dim cold blast of smelly sweaty workingman's bar that hits you BAM! in the face when you walk by and some crazy old bum opens the door.’

“He breathed his drunk’s breath on me during this. Beer, spit, germs of uncoughed coughs, old sour teeth. That breath came over the table. His face leering closer and closer, mine leaning further and further away, back against my chair. I didn’t want to make him go away, I wanted him to just forget me and drift away. To leave me alone. To zero in on some other sucker.

“He inhaled. He put both hands—big fleshy hands, the hands of a gone soft drunk—on the table and sat back. Quiet. Looking at me. Then, with that exaggerated dignity drunks assume when they feel patronised, he said:

“‘Ask me some questions.’

“And he put his hands down on his knees.

“‘Ask you what?’ I was tired. Too tired for what looked like an alcoholic sermon on life’s lessons and grand schemes gone bad.

“‘You want to know me. Smell me.’

“‘No, I can’t,’ I said ‘I’ve got a really-’

“‘Smell me!’ He pushed forward in his chair. ‘Kitchen tables. Benzedrine. Old typewriter ribbons. Smell me.’

“That tooth-beer-spit breath combo hit me again. I picked up my lighter. He grabbed my hand. I jerked. He lurched forward into my face.

“‘It’s me.’”

“‘Okay.’

“‘You want to know me? Ask me.’

“He sat back suddenly, his eyes steadier than his hands. He turned to Kevin.

“‘Two Jacks with beer backs.’

“‘You buying?’

“‘I know what you’re thinking. You’re looking at me... and you think I’m just another bum. Just a bum with broken down shoes and stinking breath. A stinking breath drunk who sits in bars and breathes his stinking breath.’

“He was getting loud. I didn’t want him to know that I had been thinking about his breath. So I quickly disagreed.

“‘No. No. I didn’t think that.’

“And I smiled warmly so I’d look honest.

“He waved his huge hand in front of his chest.

“‘S’okay. S’okay. S’long as you find out... you find out who I am.’ He coughed, and stopped talking — politely — as Kevin put the drinks on the table and dumped the ashtray. Kevin moved on. The guy picked up the shot glass and raised it. Not a tremor. He said:

“‘This is to me. This is to all that is left of me. Jack with a beer back.’

“He laughed a sort of snort/chuckle/cough laugh and he threw back the shot.

“Benzedrine and wine bottles and little dead cats in Mexican streets and now... now here... here it is.’

“He slapped the shot glass down. Then he started talking slow and started to sway. He pushed at the little glass in front of me.

“C’mon. Drink. Drink it in. Jack with a beer back.’

“He burped. Rubbed his lips with the big knuckles of his hand. And then he threw up. Threw up stuff that looked like rotted baby food. Clots of phlegm. Beer yeast. I don’t know what it was. And the smell. The smell of it coming up past the rotten mouth, over the rotten teeth. It was like every bad smell molecule in the world coming together to tug at your stomach’s pit and test your gag reflexes. It smelled so bad it hurt trying not to throw up, not to look, not to breathe.

“Instinct carried me up and away. I was at the far end of the bar—by the jukebox and the popcorn machine where the other bums were—before the first drops hit the floor. Most of the bums didn’t notice, but a couple of them looked at me. I pretended I had no idea why.

“Kevin was throwing bar towels and disinfectant over the bum and the table. The barkeeper looked over my way, held up my beer. Not the shot, the beer, I don’t even want to know what happened to the shot. And he said:

“Do you want this?”

“He was being serious. My throat pulled with a gag jerk.

“No.’ I said.

“A little after that I went home.”

Jo lit a Marlboro, dragged at it and exhaled.

“Jack with a beer back, huh?”

“As God is my witness.” I said “D’you want another beer?”

Road Song for Your Love
(For, and to be recited by, the late Barry White)

Ross Donlon

Drivin out of country,
Rollin into curves,
Reelin in the white line,
Rockin to your love.

Lonesome moon behind me,
Wolftail flies above.
We're slipstreamin sunrise,
Howlin for your love.

Wanted poster in my mind,
This Bronco props and swerves.
Hold on girl, I'm comin,
Rough ridin for your love.

Baubles on the windscreen
jumpin, push and shove.
Then Elvis steps into a set
Hip action for your love.

Stranger comin to your town,
High noon sky above,
My aerial rises to the sky,
Callin for your love.

Big hand moves to showdown,
This badge I'll wear to serve.
Burned my bags and baggage,
Now I'm smokin for your love.

The Legends of Loss

Leanne Hills

1

lights like copper snakes
flicker
at my mountain
where Bunjil sits
waiting for someone to whisper him
into creation
but the birthing stones are cold
babies lie snug in their cots
with striped toys
and landless dreams

2

this evening
at the writers' festival
the storyteller paused
an eminent silence
his audience wretched for a sage
but he'd forgotten the words

3

on the radio
the songs are all from overseas

The General's Daughter

Charles D'Anastasi

Morning continues a web of government,
A murmuring land, an infestation of silences.
Shadows toil quietly, much is left unsaid.
Her face removed, compounds their imagination.

A murmuring land, an infestation of silences.
The noosed house denies her succour, the outside world.
Her face removed, compounds their imagination,
Despite fear and uniforms streaming the breadth of the land.

The noosed house denies her succour, the outside world.
Yet it gets through, the strangers' slow give of tenderness,
Despite fear and uniforms streaming the breadth of the land.
Despite her days unvisited by even a wandering ghost.

Yet it gets through, the strangers' slow give of tenderness,
Beside news of piano music rising from the encircled house,
Despite her days unvisited by even a wandering ghost
Laws smoothed to stretch the sentence of the years.

Beside news of piano music rising from the encircled house,
A vision insists: In a huddle the generals emerge from the hissery.
Laws smoothed to stretch the sentence of the years.
A trapped house folds back on itself over and over.

A vision insists: In a huddle the generals emerge from the hissery.
Shadows toil quietly, much is left unsaid.
A trapped house folds back on itself over and over.
Morning continues a web of government.

Most People Are Good

Meera Atkinson

A sample of American article titles after 9/11:

AVOID AIRLINE TRAVEL AND THE *TERRORISTS WIN*

LEST *TERRORISTS WIN*, COUPLES GET PREGNANT

IF YOU USE ENCRYPTION, YOU HELP THE *TERRORISTS WIN*

Most people are good,
most people smile sometimes at strangers
or give an old man a seat on the bus.

Most people are good,
will do a small favor, go out of their way
for someone they don't know.

Most people are good,
help children with homework,
donate money or volunteer.

Most people are good,
even if they don't.

Most people are good,
will run to the scene of an accident and try to help.

Most people care what happens
to people on the other side of the world.

Most people nurse ailing parents, loan money,
give tourists directions.

Most people are good, even if they don't.

Most people are good,
even if they are careless and talk
on cell phones while driving.

Most people are good,
even if they've been beaten,

called names, or stood-up,
even if they have no money and live in a dump.
Most people are good, really good,
even if they drink too much or steal from department stores.

Most people are good,
even if they cheat on their taxes, buy shoes
that cost more than an average monthly rent
and have holiday homes in the Hamptons or France.
Most people are good, unspeakably good, silently good,
though they may think mean things and feel selfish.

Most people are good,
the way a blade of grass is good,
quietly so you don't see it,
mundanely so you don't notice.
Most people are good in ways we never see.
Most people can't help it.

Most people are good,
despite anger and lies and nuclear bombs.
They are good, *good*, even when they sin.
Human, seraphic, good, damn it, good.

If I don't say this, the terrorists win.

New York City, 2002

Seven: TV in Latin

After Pierre Alferi

Leanne Hills

his nose is broad aquiline
reflected back in the honed
shine of boardrooms walls and tables
the wannabees' chests taut ties
silk and next year's black they hang
on words that trick as the door
swings shut to all but the one

*superbia*¹

her perma-tan carotene
the houses white and grand and
sized for football teams she lives
in the slit of laced curtains
marking the to and fro of
glossy all terrains she has
one but no man to drive it

*invidia*²

it's the dark hour that pains
the details drained by circles
of glass he looks through bottles
and pints the moon all the way
home to snug children his wife
who shudders between sheets of
harsh syllables and whip hands

*ira*³

it's her landscape castles of
steel and cement squares of glass
she walks it hands thrust deep small
change and loose tobacco the
sky a grey rip canal choked with
a season of listlessness
no work today it whispers

*acedia*⁴

they are the dragons gorging
a hot mass of spread sheets and
percentages before them
their rodents clinging fist tight
to original intent to why
I'm here now amidst the flame
my soul only half for sale

*avaritia*⁵

it takes a crane seven men
in white and a nation of
denial to lift her from
her bed where she lay dying
a thousand creases in an
epidermis stretched beyond
reason or repair or love

*gula*⁶

he prefers the hour of
cats slides through gaps window half
closed to the night while beauty
sleeps a scape of dream cut dark
by his hand on gloved mouth limbs
wide beyond the frenzy and
the screen the audience hushed

*luxuria*⁷

¹pride, ²envy, ³wrath, ⁴sloth, ⁵greed, ⁶gluttony, ⁷lust

Happiness

Sarah Holland-Batt

Saboteurs, we argued about the war,
caulking the afternoon with the abject
as mahouts alternately grizzled and
cooed outside like so many schizoid babies.
But narratives are not monographs; our
toying with triage and insurgency no
translation of the etherised sponges and
tired needles cauterising Baghdad
nights. Two scotches later, we practiced
lovmaking while New Delhi dilated
with rickshaws—something of the ghazal's
incurious abutting in our conflation of war
talk and sex. I found myself replaying
the ordinary anorexia of beginnings: nil
by mouth, the body only half-awake and
gleaming. And although it's late to talk
of happiness, I felt it then, sidling slow
as a foal to the phosphorescence of new grass;
naïve, and wedded to a predictable end.

Out of Sight
Vera Di Campli San Vito

His chair somersaults
when I turn my back.

His chair somersaults
but he is not sitting on it.

He is travelling with the circus.
He is sending me a message.
His chair somersaults.

Historical Similes

Gigi Thibodeau

back in the day
people were like
you know
different

they weren't as
sophisticated
and they didn't like
know stuff
about the earth you know
like how it's round
they were like the earth's flat
and columbus was like no
it's round and you know
he like proved it

people were like
us then only not
so open-minded
they didn't really like
new things
the ocean was all like
here there be monsters
and pens were feathers
and it was like
no one knew how to read
and books were made from like
goatskins
and people got burned
for knowing things

it wasn't like nowadays

in those days
it was like the dark ages
it was like storms and like
night-time without lights
and like no plumbing
and hitler
and nothing to explain like
an eclipse or a volcano

and back in the day the people
at pompeii didn't like know
what had hit them

Requiem for a Restaurant Critic

Nicholas Rasche

OBITUARIES

THE EPICUREAN WORLD was saddened overnight by the untimely passing of J. MULLIGAN EVERTON, long-time restaurant critic for *Lifestylings* magazine.

Everton was credited with launching a revolution in lifestyle journalism by refusing to comment on the food served in the institutions he reviewed. As he remarked icily to this writer when grilled on the controversial practice, "I am employed to review restaurants, not food."

His earliest efforts in the genre (suppressed by Everton in his maturity) were more conventional, distinguished only by an unusually strong focus on elements of the dining experience regarded by more established critics as peripheral. His 1979 piece on the opening of La Maisonette, for instance, included three paragraphs describing the design of the waiters' uniforms and a generous 200-word section commending the choice of font used to print the menu. However, the food and wine list did come in for some attention, and the young Everton was marked down by his colleagues as just another up-and-comer.

The seminal piece that brought an end to the early period was undoubtedly his 1983 masterpiece: "The Male Restroom at Café Napolitania—an Appreciation". Bringing all his skills of acute observation and tart wit to a long-underappreciated aspect of gastronomy, his glowing endorsement of what he claimed as "perhaps the only facilities in the Southern Hemisphere worthy of a truly discerning *aficionado*" raised eyebrows in the industry and was credited for a 25 per cent increase in business for the restaurant in question, which soon switched to a fibre and prune-based menu in response.

Now established as the *enfant terrible* of food writing (as it was still then sometimes known), Everton cut a swathe through the sacred cows

of the fine dining scene. Chef Michel de Escaline's Flowering Cherry, long considered the *doyenne* of the city's elite trattoria, never recovered from Everton's dismissal of its lighting fixtures as "execrable beyond hope of redemption". The closing of de Escaline's establishment the following month marked the end of a 40-year era and launched a bitter feud between the two. De Escaline's assessment of Everton as being "unable to tell the difference between a shrimp fork and a fish knife", which ended with the master chef offering to insert either, or both, of the two implements mentioned between Everton's eyes should he ever dare venture into his new establishment, Chez Gratien, was considered hot-blooded and rash even by his colleagues. It failed of its purpose as Everton, disguised in turban and false moustache, gained entry to the new bistro and found it unable to meet his demanding standards. In Everton's words:

One is willing to make allowances for the haste with which this latest entry into the flotilla of upper-end restaurants was launched, and even inclined to forgive the predictable décor and uninspired choice of background music (though one cannot resist reminding the proprietor that a tranquil dining experience and Klausenbrack's inferior 1960 recording of Bach's *Cello Sonatas* have ever been strange bedfellows). What places the establishment beyond the pale, however, is the appalling choice of pale green paint in the rest rooms, which allows the already visible mildew stains full opportunity to impinge equally on one's visual field and digestive process. Not recommended.

Everton never forgave a dirty bathroom, and de Escaline never forgave the insult. Chez Gratien closed its doors in January 1984 and Everton began finding spoiled salmon mousse on his doorstep soon afterwards. Police were eventually forced to issue a restraining order.

There were others who felt the wrath of Everton's avenging pen. Adrian Chao of The Yellow Emperor was stung to be labelled "one who before the altar of Epicurus postures and poses but never descends to bow". Two spelling errors in the same menu were two too many for Everton to accept and the men had words at the Meal of the Year Awards. Eventually, Chao was forced to add a full-time proofreader to his staff, an expense he bitterly, and publicly, resented.

But there were those who had reason to be grateful to the man labelled "the Jacques Derrida of restaurant critics". Giovanni Fiorello's Italia Bene was floundering in the face of conventional criticism which

labelled its offerings “bland”, “tasteless”, “unimaginative” and “at these prices, little short of outright theft”. It took the bold vision of Everton to proclaim Italia Bene’s tablecloths as “a vision of stunning chiaroscuro and daring contrasts that makes Picasso’s *Guernica* look like a McDonald’s tablemat”. The original cloth from Everton’s table that night was eventually sold at Sotherby’s for 3.4 million dollars.

Critics of Everton’s methods will no doubt continue after his death, as they did throughout his life, to label his work as pretentious, deliberately obscure and “irrelevant to the point of surrealism” (Messinger, *Journal of Asia-Pacific Food Studies*, vol. xxi). Those of us who knew the man, however, had no choice but to respect his fierce independence of mind, startling originality of vision and tireless pursuit of perfection. His stern commandment, “the meal is not the experience, it is merely the pretext for the experience”, as well as his light-hearted mot, “the food is the prelude—the flush is the symphony”, will ever ring in our ears. It is in that spirit that I invite Everton’s fans to join me this Friday at La Vinegarette for a commemorative feast in which we will sample both the bathroom in which he spent those final painful minutes and the prawn and oyster salad that killed him.

Moonkus

Kevin Gillam

Tuesday, the moon orange
unrhyming, so I puff my
stained pillow 'neath it

Thursday, an owl perched on
the stop sign, so I conform
(for wisdom, not word)

Friday, push-ups beside
Jesus, six-pack the envy
of my star-shot eyes

Sunday, hypotenuse,
toes on limestone moss, propped as
sum of inky squares

Monday, 'neath street light glow,
ear to trunk, box tree dying,
crickles, calls my name

One Hundred Random Cows

Sean M. Whelan

1. Start

They came to him at night to begin with
and that's how it started.

That's how the whole cow thing started.

2. Dreams

Occupying the road ahead
frosted and frozen in his highbeams.

Roadblock of flesh.

And always he stops

in this dream,

gets out of the car

and he stands there

legs spread,

one hand touching the bonnet

the security of industry

the other touching the soft fabric of his pants

the security of fashion,

and the only thing moving

in this dream

is

steam.

3. Steam

Rises slowly off the bonnet

(to the tick tick ticking of the unwinding engine)

and steam of breath

life leaking from the mouths

of

beast

automobile

and him

floats skyward.

Because all life that leaks

floats.

All life that leaks
floats.

4. Message

On the side of the cow
a message is painted
“one hundred
and you will know”
and this dream occurs several times
before he knows
that it will take 100 cows
before he knows.

5. Driving

Every week
twice a week
he points his car in a random direction
and he drives.
He drives to where city and country collide
until he comes across a cow
and he stops his car
and he takes his camera from the glovebox
and he photographs
the first cow he sees,
and through the lens he looks into the
glassy blackness of a cow's eye
and he recalls the dream
and the steam
and the message,
one hundred and he will know.

6. Must They Be Real?

One week the first cow he comes across is on a billboard
by the side of the highway
and he stops and wonders
did the dream dictate whether the first cow seen
be real or could it be
an ad by the side of the highway
(for some butterspread dream)
and it seems to him
that it could,
so he takes the picture
and leaves.

7. Monthly Development

Once a month he develops the film
and adds eight cows to the wall by his bed,
at night
they stare over him
and he dreams of nothing
that he can remember
with certainty,
except that one time
when he dreamt of milk
bleeding
from his palms.

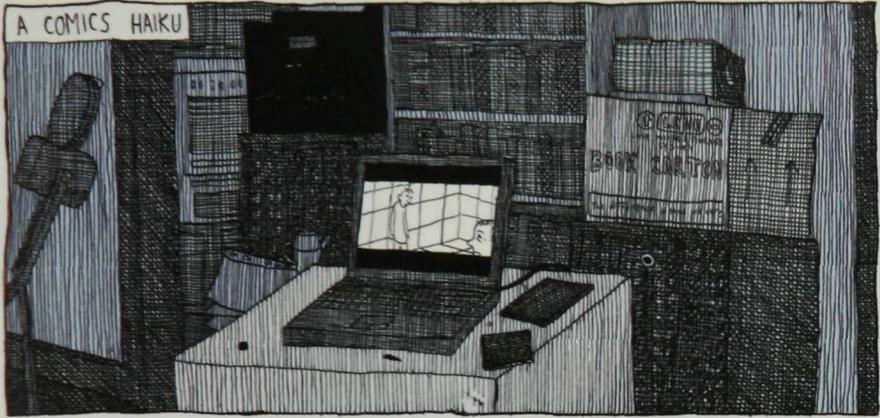
8. Simple arithmetic

Every week
twice a week
eight random cows a month
it takes almost a year
to photograph
100
random
cows.

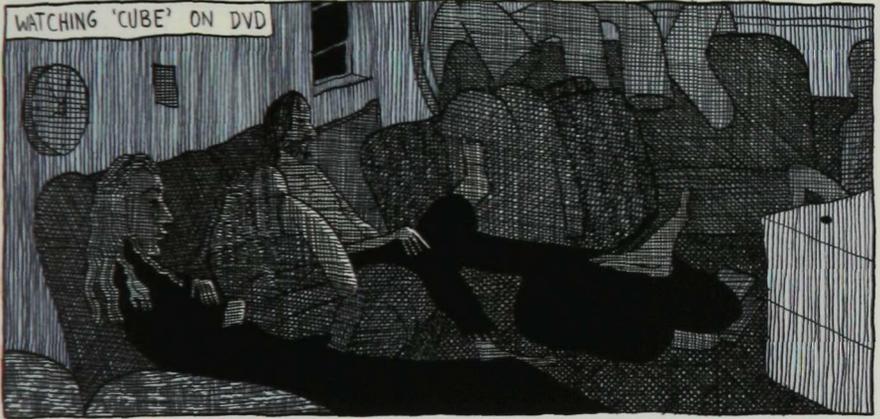
9. one hundred and you will know

After placing the hundredth cow on the last row of
ten by ten random cows
he steps back
and stares
and he wonders if he knows
as the river of milk through his veins
slows,
he presses a hand to his face
the security of familiar flesh
and he touches
until
he knows,
and while the sound of cattle moving through city streets
grows
he turns from 100 random cows
he walks through the house
opens the front door
and waits.

A COMICS HAIRU



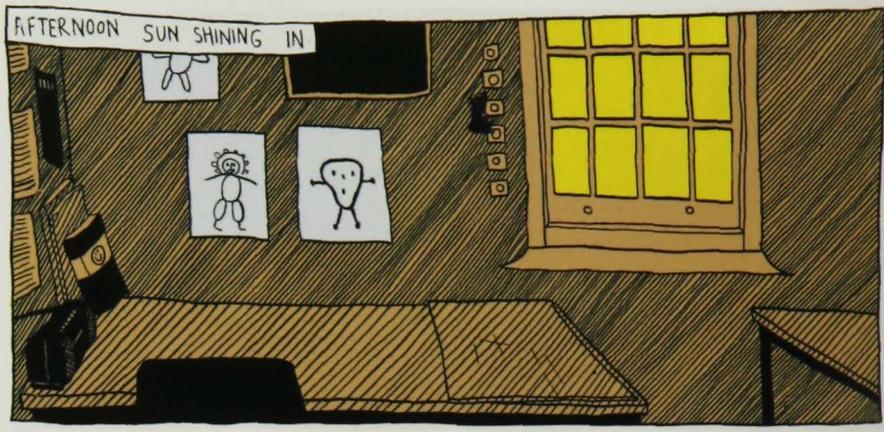
WATCHING 'CUBE' ON DVD



THE STENCH OF DAVE'S FEET



Leigh Rigozzi 12/04/04



30/04/04

FEELING EMBARRASSED



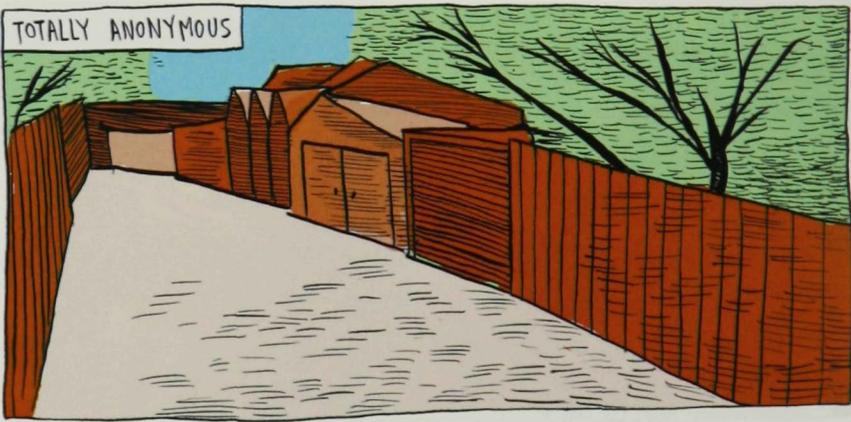
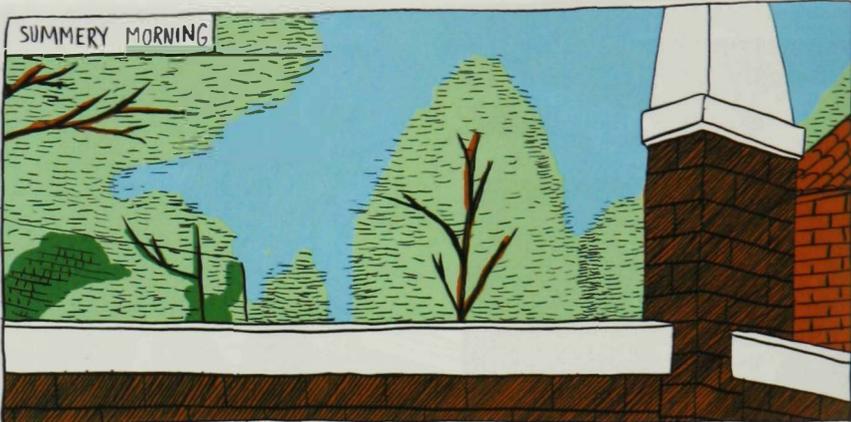
AT SOMEONE ELSE'S PARTY



BEER AND CIGARETTES



17/07/04



23/10/06



SELF STALKER!

On the trail of me

It started when I Googled myself.



I found my address, phone number,
email and where I worked.



Later that night I called myself,
but hung up immediately.
(What if I would pick up? What would I say?)



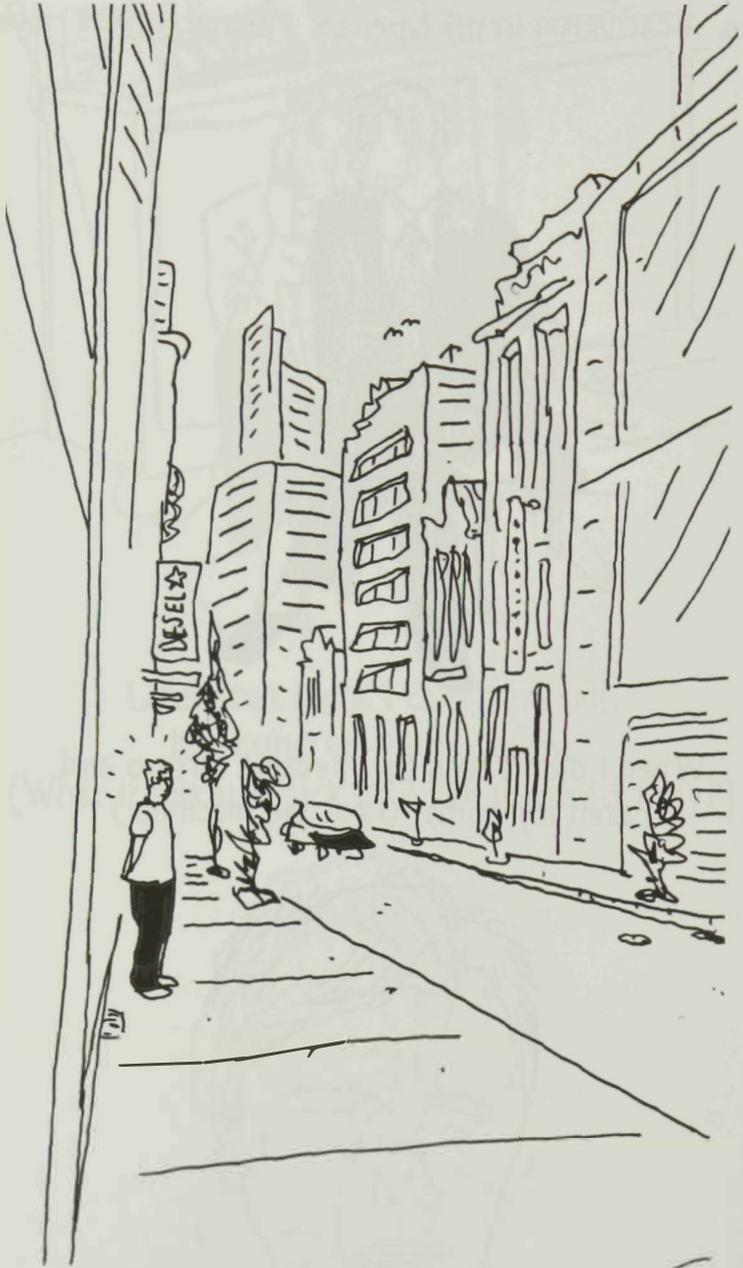
On the weekend I wrote me a letter,
inviting me for a coffee.

On Thursday I sat waiting in the café wearing, as I had wrote, a carnation in my lapel so I'd recognise myself.



When I didn't turn up I became furious and called my home. (I got the machine.)





The next day I stood outside my office hoping to catch a glimpse of me. Nothing.

Frustration turned to depression,
which in turn led to feelings of revenge.



Later that night, after a few beers,
I went around to my house and
knocked on the door.



After no one answered I broke in.



To my amazement my whole place was decked out in pictures of me!



By now it was eleven so I resolved to sit and wait for that psycho bastard to return.

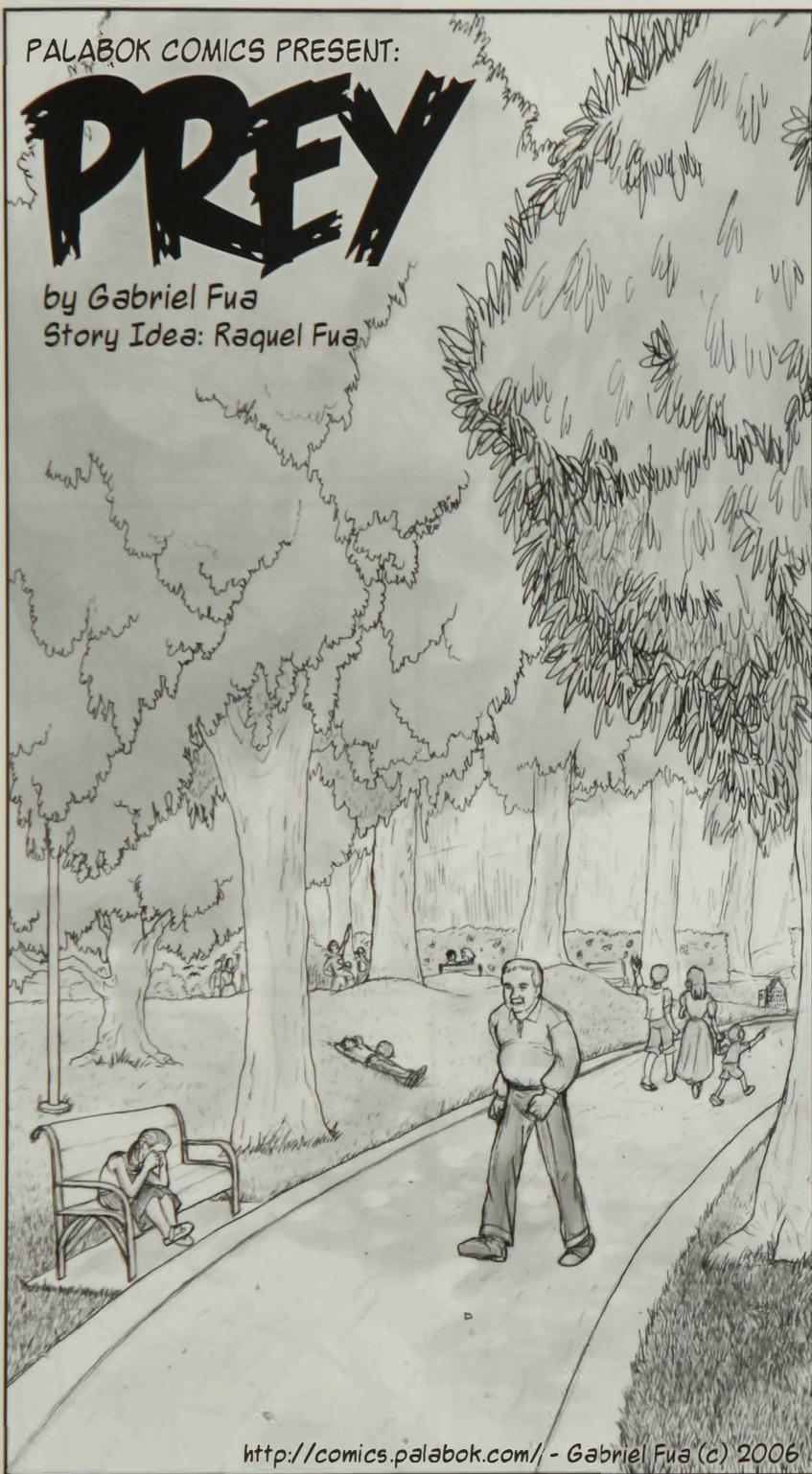
Oslo

PALABOK COMICS PRESENT:

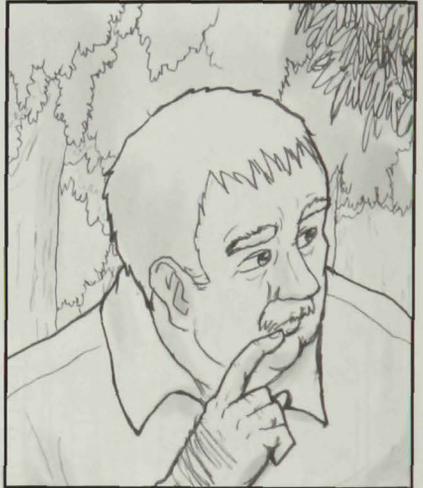
PREY

by Gabriel Fua

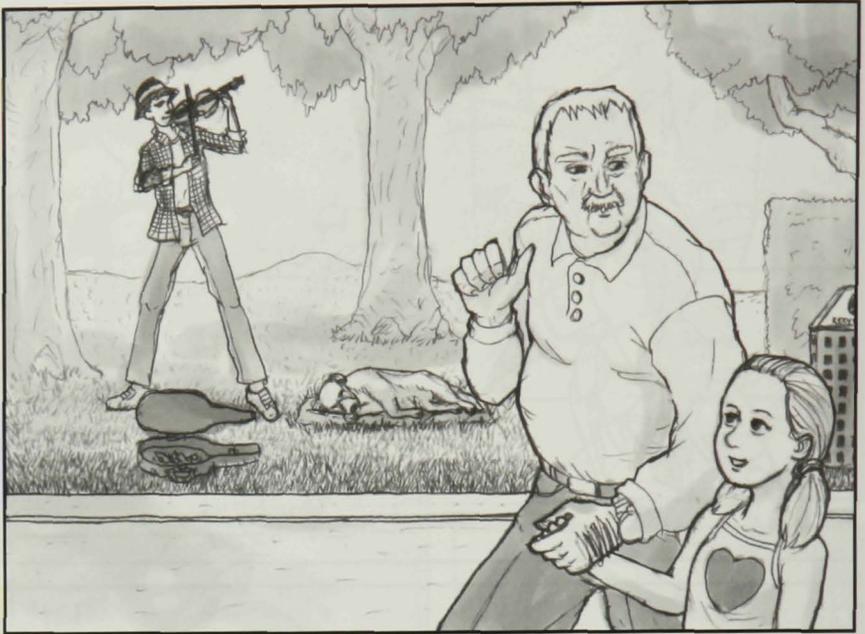
Story Idea: Raquel Fua



<http://comics.palabok.com/> - Gabriel Fua (c) 2006

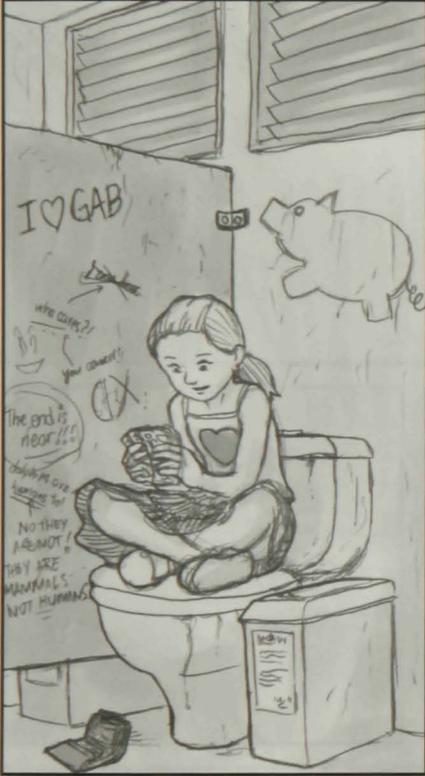
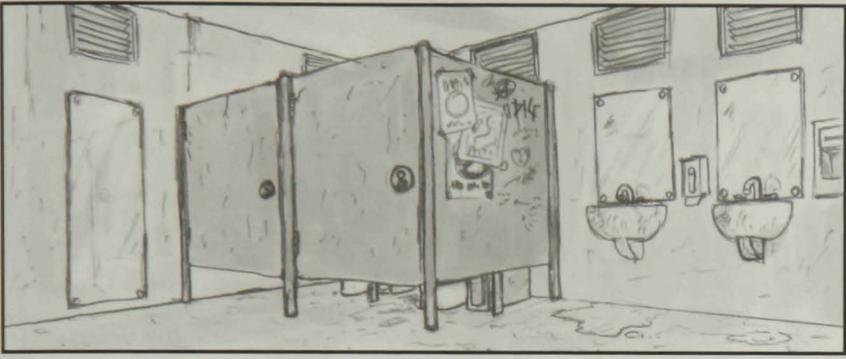






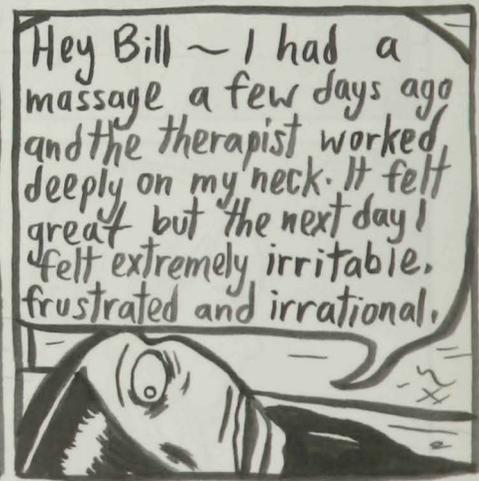


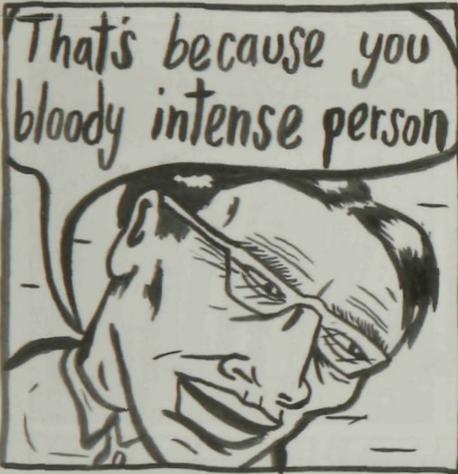




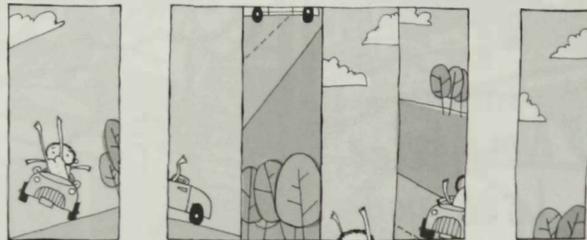
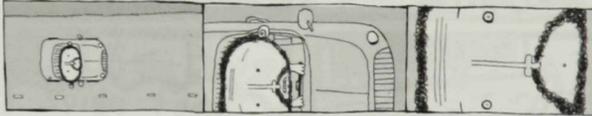
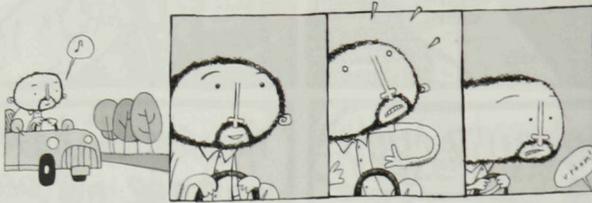
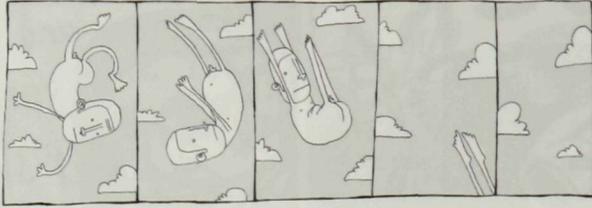








End.



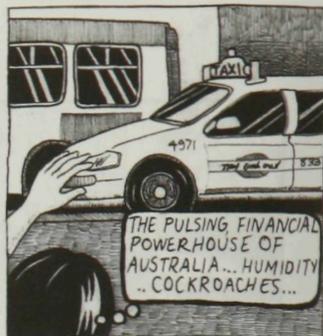


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EXQUISITE CORKS

BY MIRRANDA BURTON

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA, JANUARY 2005



THE NEXT DAY DISNEYTOON STUDIOS AUSTRALIA OPENED THE DOORS TO EIGHT NEW OPTIMISTIC TRAINEE 'INBETWEENERS'...



THE ART OF INBETWEENING INVOLVES SUPPLYING ENOUGH DRAWINGS BETWEEN THE KEYFRAMES OF THE ANIMATION TO ENSURE FLUIDITY IN THE ACTION.

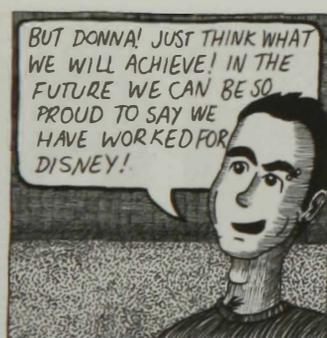
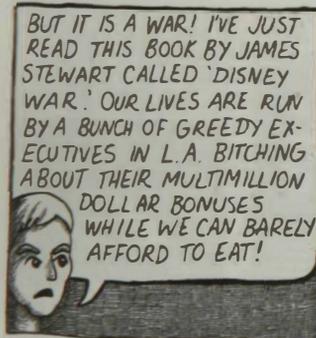
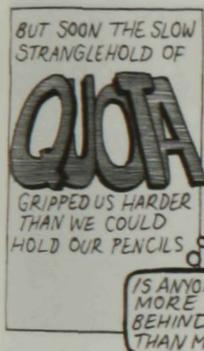
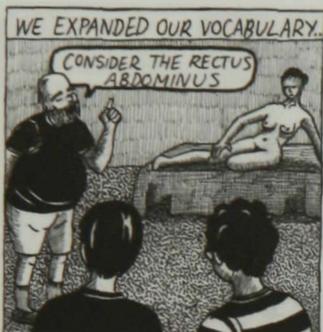


WE DREW TO DRILLS ON ANATOMY, VOLUME & CONTINUITY. WE INTERPRETED TIMING GRIDS & ANIMATOR'S 'RUFF' IDEAS. WE LEARNED THAT THE SECRET LIFE OF HAIR WAS CALLED 'SECONDARY ACTION' AND THAT A SLOW MOVEMENT WAS FULL OF 'CUSHIONS.'



JANE, OUR PATIENT TRAINER WAS THERE TO CHECK EVERY SINGLE DRAWING





FINDING SOME BALANCE IN OUR LIVES WAS A HUGE CHALLENGE. WHAT COULD I POSSIBLY SQUEEZE BETWEEN THE IN-BETWEENS? SHOPPING? LAUNDRY? A BOYFRIEND?



MY PARTNER THAT MY DRAW-

JONATHAN WAS AWARE ING BOARD WAS TURNING ME INTO SOME KIND OF DRAWING-BORG.



.. BUT SOMETIMES HE COULD SAY THE SIMPLEST THINGS TO BRING ME BACK TO MY HUMAN FORM..

HOW ABOUT SOME MOTHER CHU'S CHINESE TAKE AWAY?



..AND TO OUR HOME..



THE BONUS FEATURE OF OUR APARTMENT IS THE VIEW; A COURTYARD FULL OF BINS WHERE PEOPLE THROW OUT ALL KINDS OF USEFUL STUFF.

WOW! A NEW VACUUM CLEANER! I CAN FINALLY CLEAN OUR HOUSE!



AS AN INBETWEENER AND A DANCER, WE HAVE HARDLY MARRIED OUR FORTUNES TOGETHER, SO JONATHAN HAS DEVELOPED A FINELY TUNED RADAR FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD CASTAWAYS.



SOME OF THE MOST UNLIKELY THINGS COME HOME AS HOUSEHOLD GIFTS...



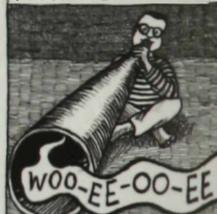
.. A GAS MASK

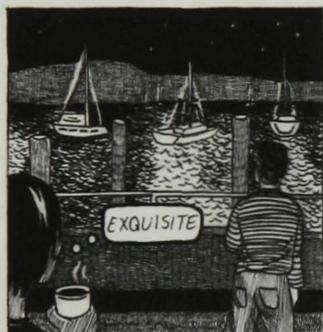
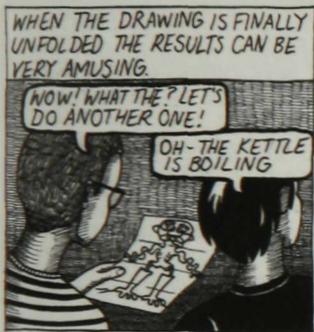
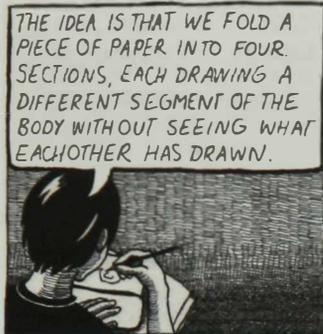
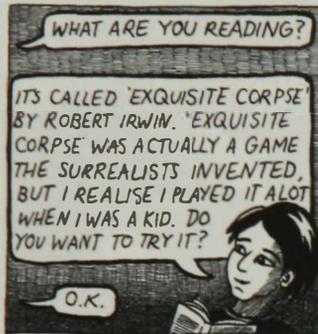


A SELECTION OF HATS FOR TWO YEAR OLDS..

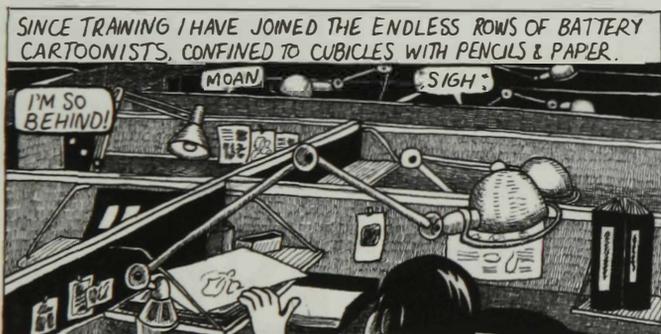


..AND SOME PVC PIPE CUT OFFS TO USE FOR DIDJERIDOO PRACTICE.

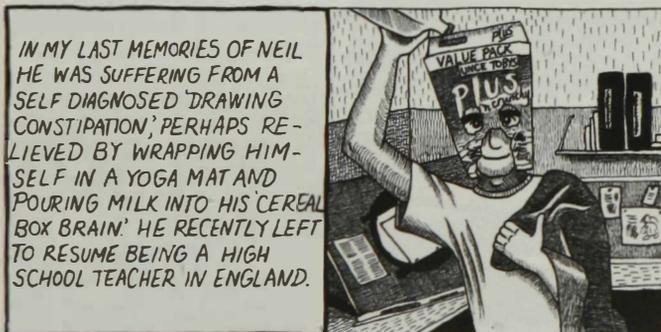




BACK AT THE MOUSEHOUSE.. AND ALMOST A YEAR AND A HALF HAS PASSED. IN THIS TIME ALMOST THREE FEATURE LENGTH FILMS HAVE ROLLED OFF OUR ACHING FINGERS; BAMBI II, BROTHER BEAR II, AND WE ARE NOW IN THE FINAL STAGES OF CINDERELLA III.



SO MUCH HAS CHANGED. DONNA LEFT TO RECLAIM SOME INTEGRITY WORKING IN GRAPHIC DESIGN. PETE FOUND HIMSELF A JOB IN THE MORE FASHIONABLE ARENA OF 3D COMPUTER ANIMATION, AND CELESE DEVELOPED SUCH BAD PAINS IN HER WRISTS FROM DRAWING SHE HAD TO CALL IT QUITS TOO.



SCOTT IS STILL HERE, HIS CUBICLE FUELLED LIKE WILLY WONKA'S FACTORY.

HEY SCOTTIE - HAVE YOU GOT ANY OF THOSE MINT CREAMS?

NASH RARELY LEAVES HIS DESK. I DON'T THINK HE HAS EVER KNOWN SUCH PUNISHMENT FROM A PENCIL ...

.. WHILE STEVEN HAS SUCH SPECIAL DRAWING POWERS I THINK HIS DESK PRODUCES WORK WHILE HE'S NOT EVEN THERE.

THE BIGGEST CHANGE IN EVERYBODY'S LIVES HOWEVER HAS BEEN AN ANNOUNCEMENT.

I AM TERRIBLY SORRY TO ANNOUNCE THAT DISNEY HAS DECIDED TO CLOSE OUR STUDIO

OUR ENTIRE STUDIO (ROUGHLY 250 PEOPLE) ARE TO LOSE OUR JOBS. WHY FARM THE PENCIL PUSHERS WHEN WE CAN FARM COMPUTERS TO RENDER THEIR WAY THROUGH QUOTA DAY AND NIGHT? 3D COMPUTER ANIMATION IS SIMPLY STEAMROLLING THE HANDMADE FILM, SO IF YOU BELIEVE WALT DISNEY'S HEAD REALLY IS FROZEN, THEN HE'S PROBABLY THAWING IN RAGE. THE IRONY IS THAT DISNEY WILL CONTINUE TO MAKE 2D ANIMATION BY CRANKING UP HUMAN EXPLOITATION; USING SWEATSHOPS IN THIRD-WORLD COUNTRIES. OUR STUDIO IS THE LAST DISNEY OWNED TRADITIONAL ANIMATION STUDIO LEFT IN THE WORLD.

DESPITE ASSUMING THE STATUS OF 'ENDANGERED SPECIES' DUE TO THIS EARTHQUAKE IN TRADITIONAL ANIMATION HISTORY, PRODUCTION CONTINUES AS NORMAL UNTIL WE CLOSE. MOST PEOPLE FEEL BOTH DAUNTED AND DELIGHTED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THAT TREADING THE MOUSEWHEEL OF QUOTA IS GOING TO STOP AND FLING US INTO THE UNKNOWN.

EMPIRES CRUMBLE, BOMBS EXPLODE, ICE CAPS MELT, ISLANDS SINK AND YET MY ATTENTION IS LOST TO MISCHIEVOUS TUFTS OF HAIR, AND THE UNDERESTIMATED LIFE OF LOOSE CLOTHING.

WHY DOES THIS TROLLOP HAVE TO BE WEARING A DRESS WHILE STANDING IN THE WIND!?

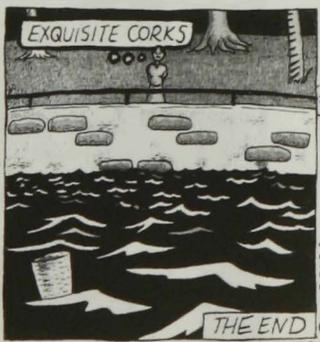
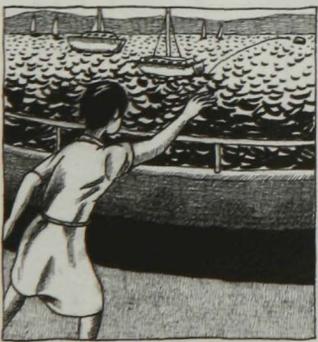
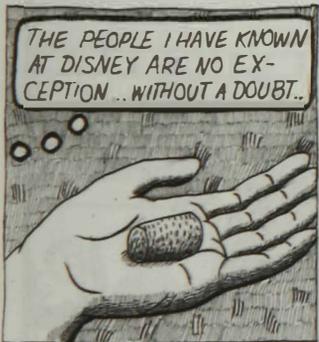
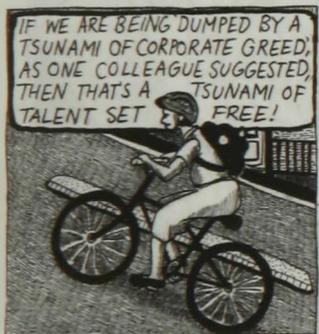
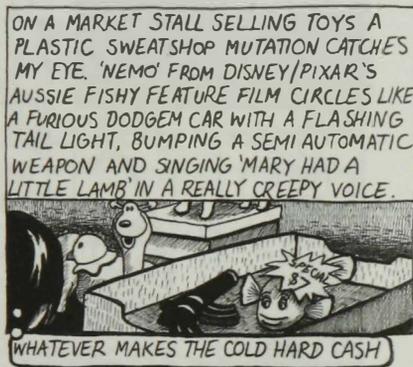
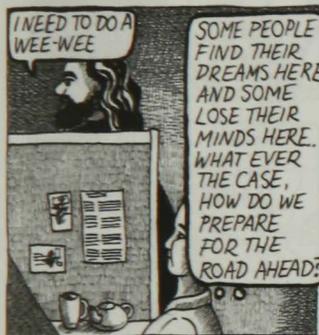
GRRR!.. AND WHY SUCH AN EXCESSIVE AMOUNT OF WAND WAVING IN THIS FILM!?!.. GUESS I'LL PUT ON ANOTHER AUDIO BOOK

THE INBETWEENING HEADQUARTERS OUTSIDE MY CUBICLE IS A BUZZING EMPORIUM OF ROCK GOSSIP AND RANDOM COMMENTS, BREAKING MY TRANCE OCCASIONALLY.

ANAL FURY!

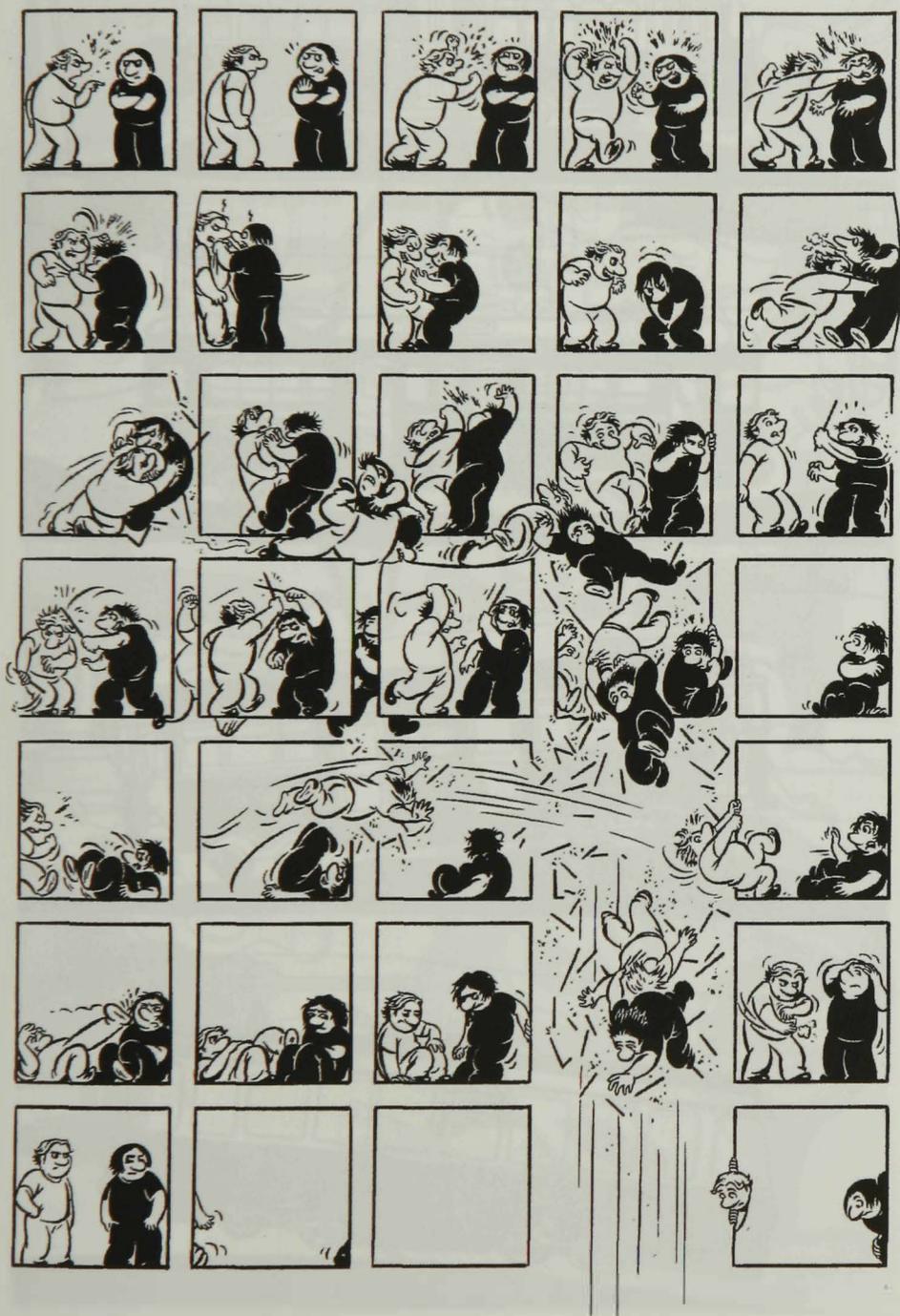
GEORDIE?

ANIMATION FURY! GUESS I HAD BETTER GET THIS SCENE CHECKED BY THE ANIMATOR





ANTIC ANTIC



so where is it?



I dunno



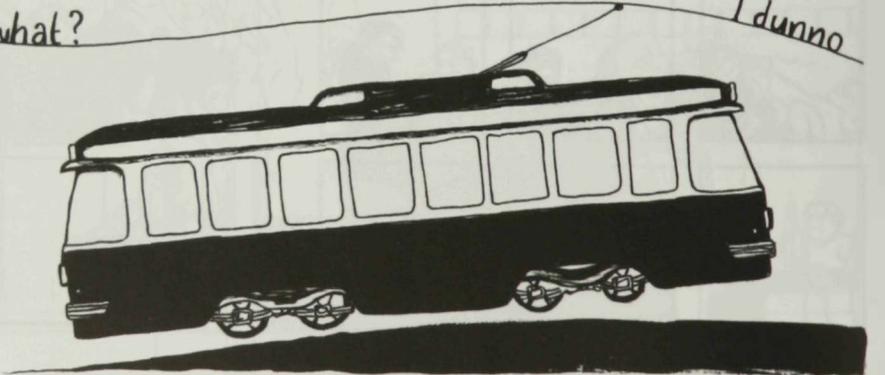
well...ask the driver

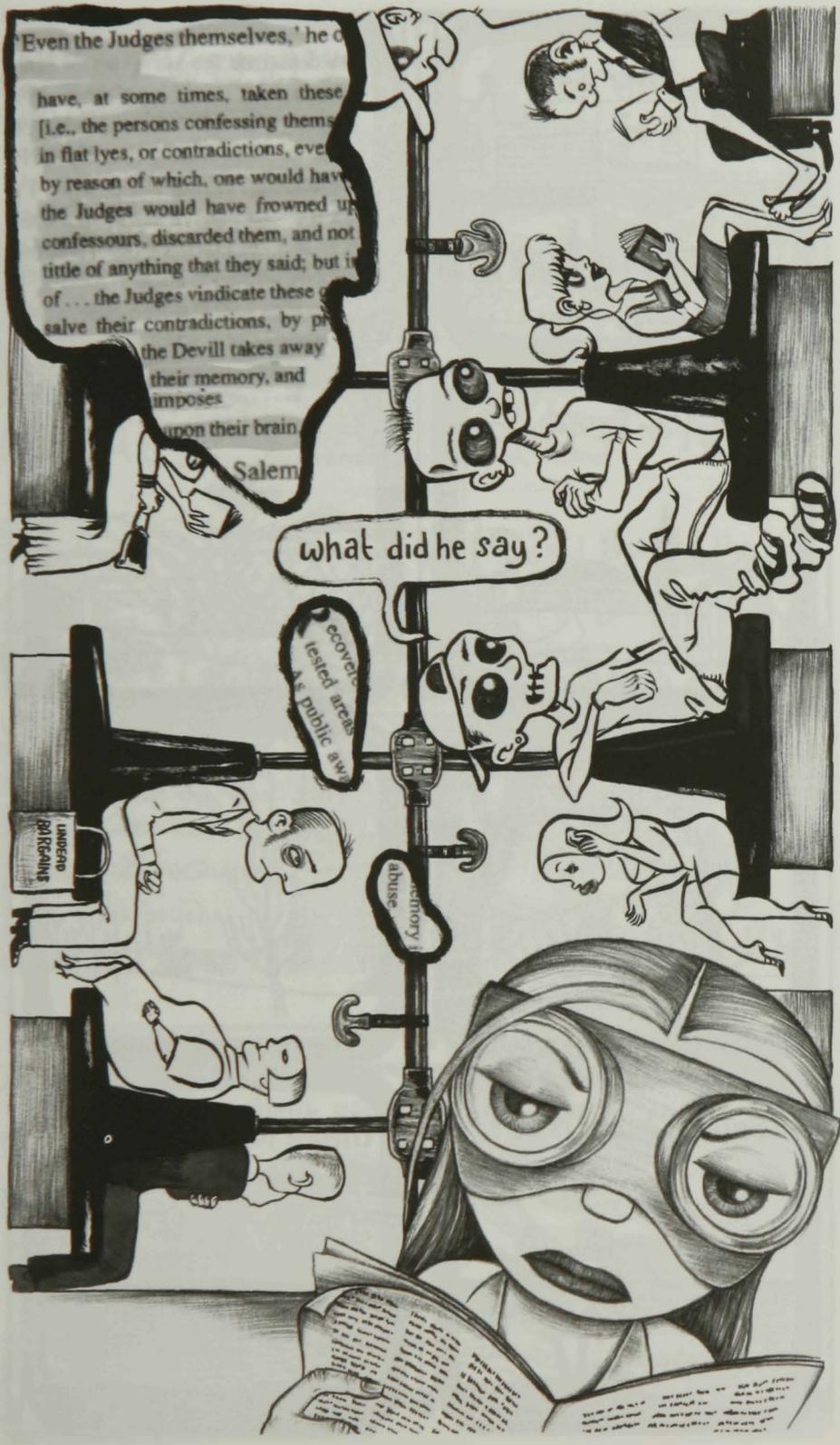
he'll just say the same



what?

I dunno





the driver says



'far to go' or...



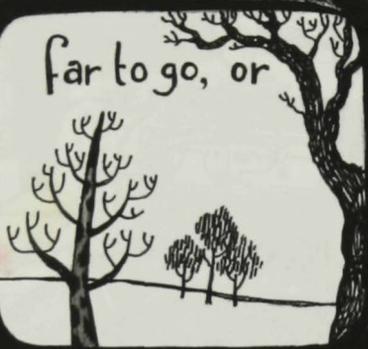
'not far to go.'



what?



far to go, or



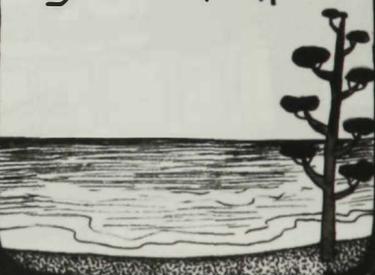
not far to go.

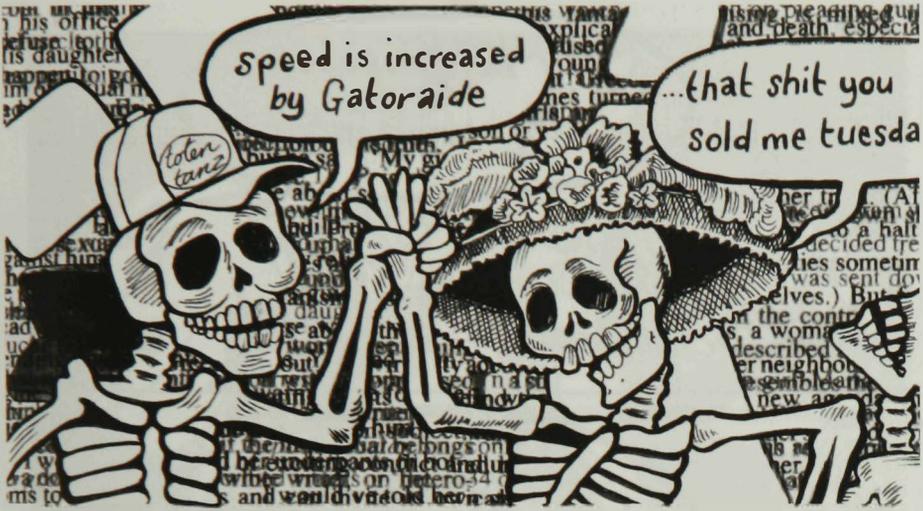


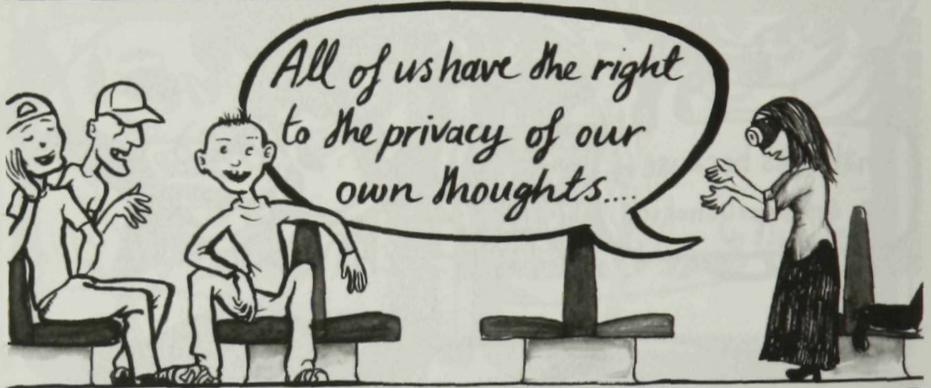
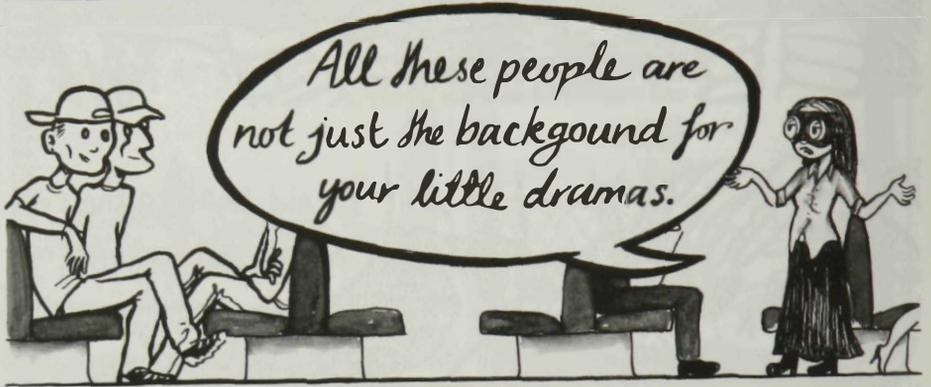
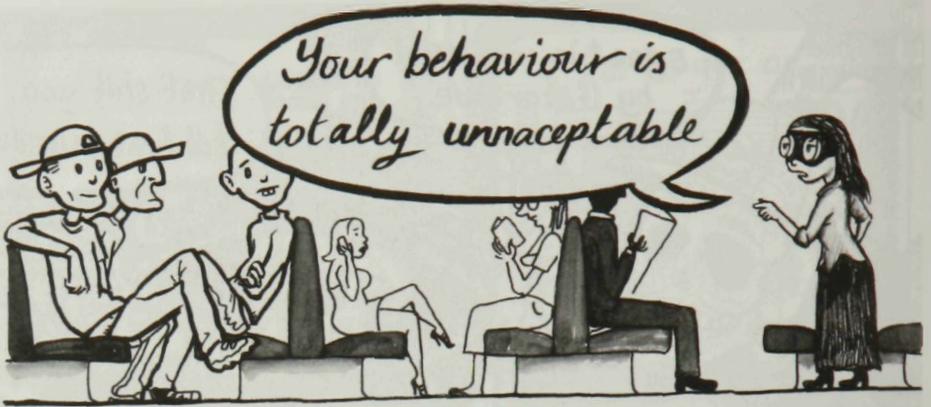
Well... which is it?



they're kind of different...









IN THE HEAT OF THE MOMENT I CUT OFF MY TAIL

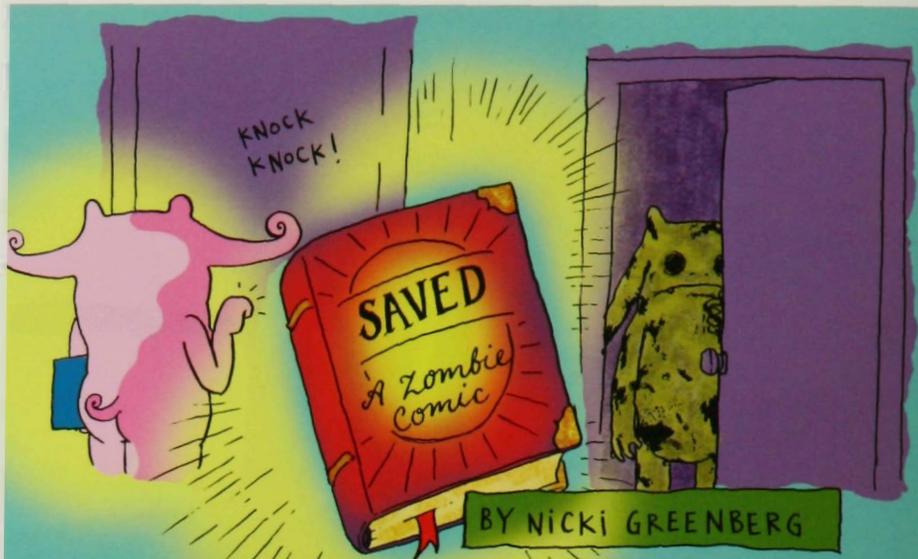


A.SIMIC

MICH 04







KNOCK
KNOCK!

SAVED

A Zombie
Comic

BY NICKI GREENBERG



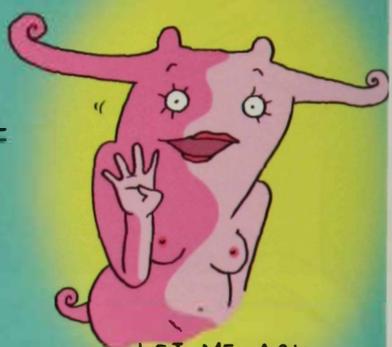
HELLO!
I'M
MELANIE,
FROM
SPIRITUAL
SOLUTIONS!



HHH...



NOW, I
CAN TELL
THAT
SOMETHING
IS MISSING
IN YOUR
LIFE.



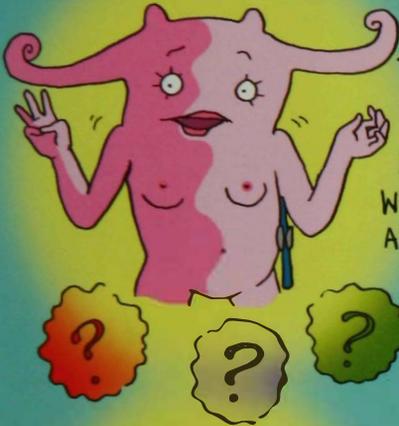
LET ME ASK
YOU JUST
FOUR QUESTIONS...



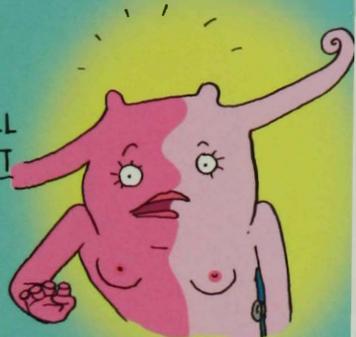
- HAVE YOU EVER FELT ALONE?



- EVER CRAVED A SENSE OF HIGHER PURPOSE?



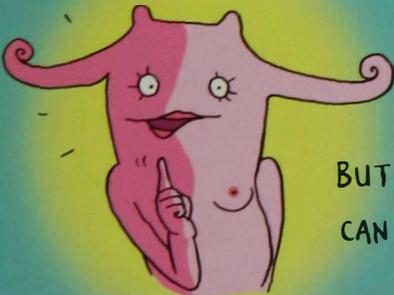
- EVER WONDERED HOW TO REALLY TELL WHAT'S RIGHT AND WHAT'S WRONG?



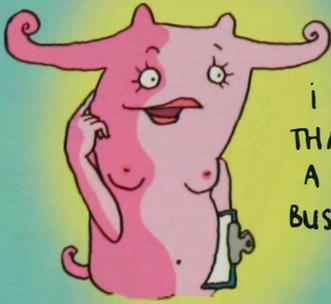
- EVER FEARED DEATH?? THE VOID??



OF COURSE YOU HAVE! EVERYONE HAS!



BUT WE CAN HELP...



YOU SEE,
I CAN TELL
THAT YOU'RE
A VERY
BUSY PERSON.



YOU DON'T
HAVE THE
TIME TO
SORT OUT
THESE
"WEIGHTY
QUESTIONS".



SO
THAT'S
WHERE
WE COME
IN!



WE DO THE
"THINKING"
FOR YOU!



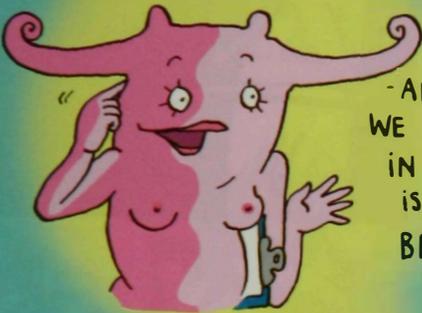
WE'LL GIVE YOU A COMPLETE
PACKAGE:

- ★ A SENSE OF BELONGING!
- ★ AN INSTANT "SPIRITUAL" LIFT!
- ★ AN AFTERLIFE STORYBOOK!
- ★ AN EASY-TO-INSTALL MORAL READY RECKONER!!





OF COURSE
YOU ALSO
GET A
GENUINE
CERTIFICATE OF
SUPERIORITY.



-AND ALL
WE ASK FOR
IN RETURN
IS YOUR
BRAIN!



SO, LET'S
SIGN YOU UP
NOW,
SHALL
WE?



Michi
2006

magnificent
twerp



the heart thro b

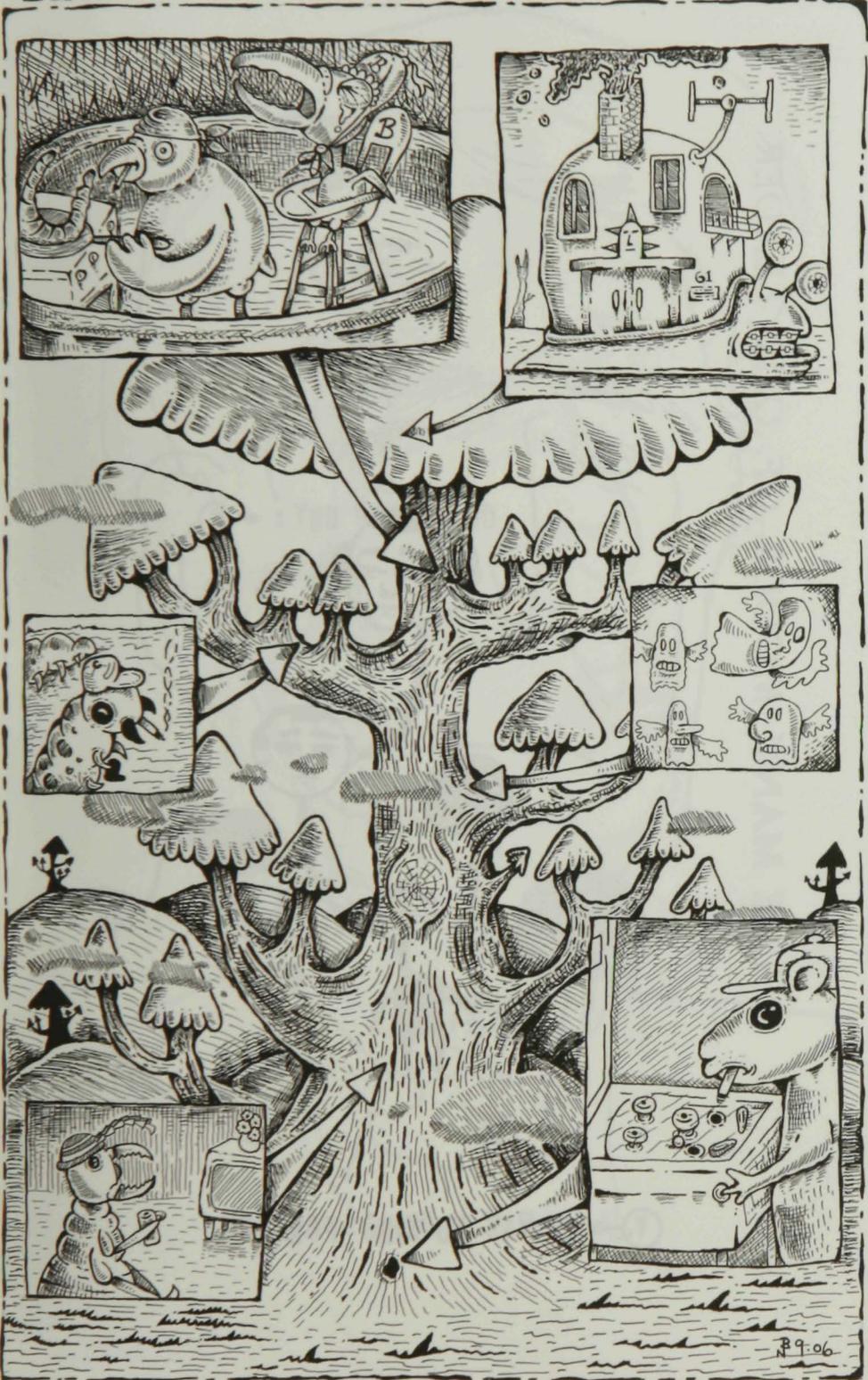


hidden
agenda



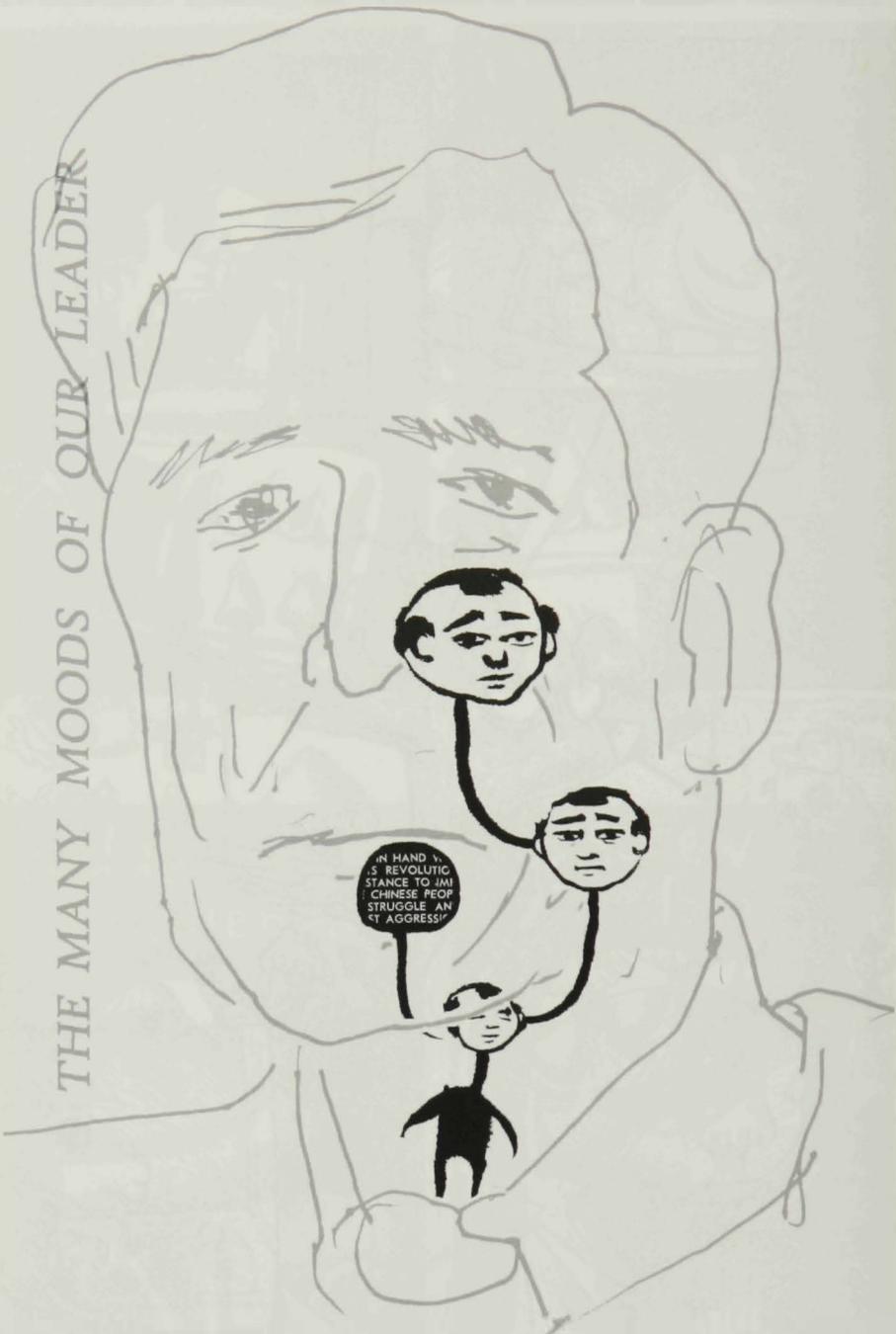
screw
loose





N 9.06

THE MANY MOODS OF OUR LEADER



IN HAND VS
S REVOLUTIC
STANCE TO JMI
CHINESE PEOP
STRUGGLE AN
ST AGGRESSIV

① → : I WAS LOOKING FOR YOU

: BEMUSED

Chinese
while sign
eaders of
Date



② → : YOU NEVER SAID

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untries an
viet Unio



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world liberatic
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ostile to the l



③ → : WHEN...? WHEN DID I...?

: PRESIDENTIAL

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—all this it
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④ → : IT'S NÖT LIKE...

and

both

which

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must

be so

⑤ → :: YÄRSTËY...Y



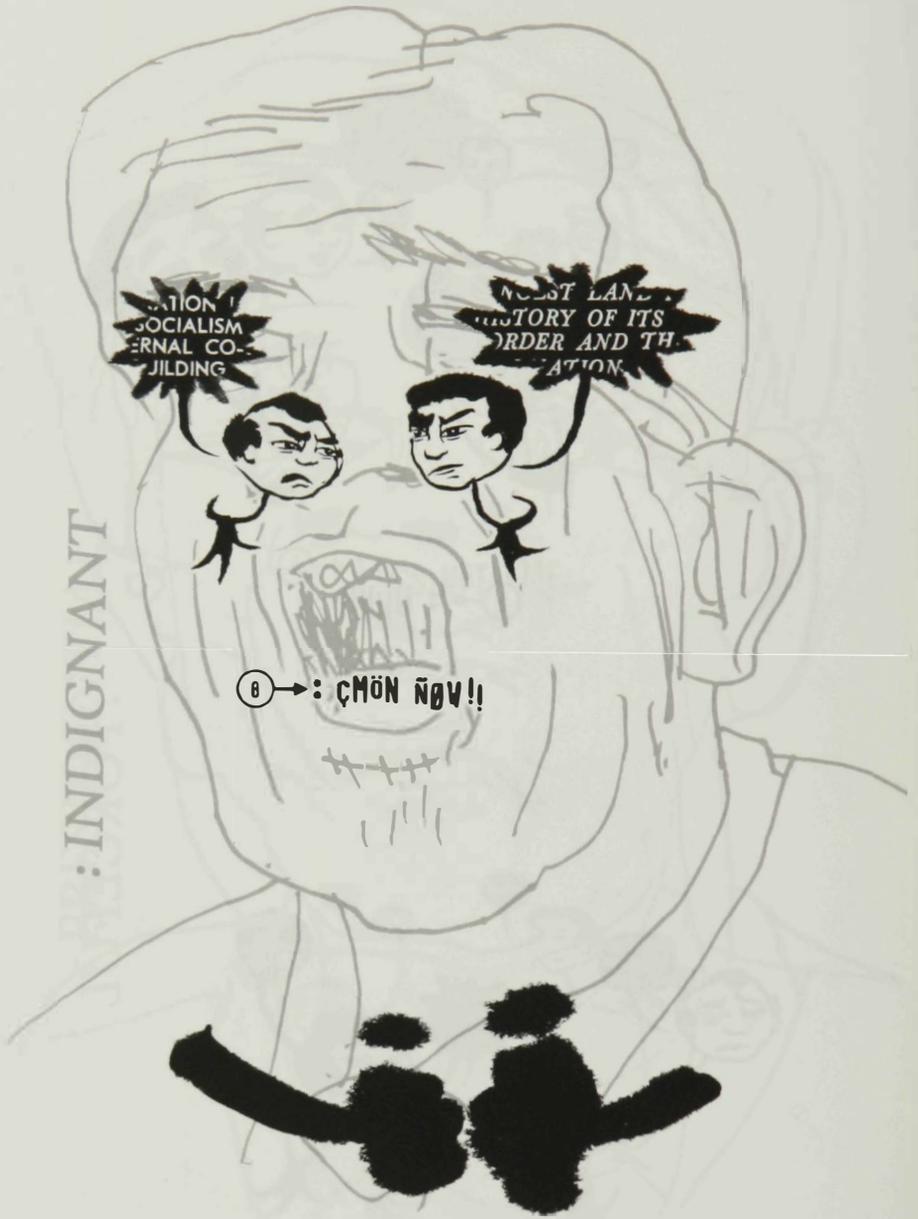
6 -> : ÜHHH

FORCEFUL

ordering them to of deliv

ON FIRMA... TERNAL FRIENDS!

7 -> : I LÖV3 YBÜ...



ATION
SOCIALISM
ERNAL CO-
JILDING

NUST LANE
HISTORY OF ITS
ORDER AND TH
ATION

: INDIGNANT

⑧ → : ÇMÖN ÑØV!!

⑨ → : THIS TIME



18 → : IT MEANS SOMETHING



TOYS by Skimmo

When I'm not making comics or reading or going to ballet classes or planting flowers or worrying about cruelty to animals, I am usually making toys.



I used to make toys and puppets as a child out of scraps of things that I found but forgot the art for many years until I saw some home-made toys similar to what I used to make for sale in a local shop.



Not long after that I started to make toys again and sell them in small shops. I have been doing so ever since.

The first toys that I made when re-discovering my skills became Christmas presents for some close friends.

I made my ex-boyfriend some toys with heart-shaped heads and that held hands to show him that in spite of everything that had gone wrong, I still wanted to remain friends.



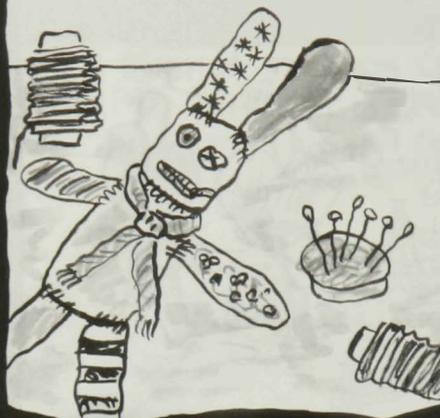
Soon afterwards I noticed that he'd stopped talking to me very much. I asked him what was wrong and he told me that he was having a few problems with his new girlfriend and that he would get back in touch with me as soon as he'd sorted things out.



He never did.



I wonder if he still has the toys.



I also made a toy for one of my best friends who I had not seen very much for the past year as he had been working in another part of the state.



I was hoping that he might stay in the same town as me after that job finished but instead he got a job in Melbourne. At least this new job was only for nine months while some-one had a baby.

As he packed a suitcase of essentials to take with him (clothes, favourite books and cds, everything else was being put in to storage until he came back) I noticed that he had packed the toy bunny I made.

The Sandman



Todo list:
1. ...
2. ...
3. ...

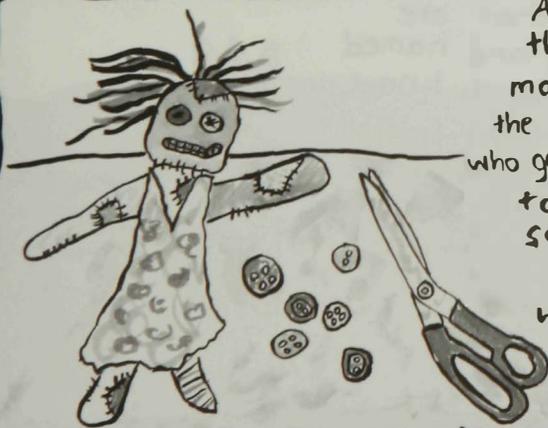
I was very touched by this.
"You're taking the bunny!" I said.
"Of course," he said "Don't be sad, I
won't be in Melbourne for too long.
I don't want to live there forever.
I'll be back in nine months."



But he wasn't.



I hope he still has the bunny.



At about
this time, I
made a toy for
the special friend
who got me organised
to start
selling the toys
that I
was making.

That was okay. For a while. A year went by and she mentioned a couple of times that she might be going to move to Sydney. But, she said, probably not because she liked the friends she had here. So she would most likely stay.

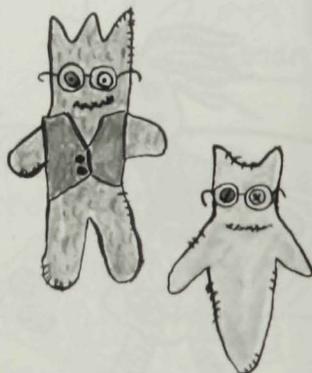


She changed her mind. She's moving away in a few months to be an artist in a big city.



I wonder if she'll take the doll I made with her.

Recently I have made some toys that are inspired by and named after people I know. As recognition for letting me borrow their characteristics I have decided to give them gifts of the toys bearing their names.



But, if I give these friends the toys
I made, does that mean that they
will go away too?



THE
END

ABOUT TWO YEARS BEFORE WE BROKE UP, WE HAD LUNCH AT A SHOPPING COMPLEX NEAR MY WORK.

LOST



YOUR MOM HAD STOPPED AT A STORE.



I HAD TO GET BACK TO WORK AND AFTER ABOUT TEN MINUTES I STARTED GETTING IMPATIENT.



THEN IT OCCURED TO ME THAT SHE'D NEVER BEEN HERE BEFORE AND WAS LOST ON ANOTHER LEVEL.



I STARTED TO WORRY. I DIDN'T CARE ABOUT WORK ANYMORE. I JUST WANTED TO FIND HER.



WHEN I DID SHE WAS
VERY UPSET, BUT
WOULDN'T LOOK AT ME.



SHE WAS AFRAID I WAS
ANGRY AT HER, BUT,
BY THEN, I DIDN'T FEEL
THAT WAY AT ALL.



I FELT BAD. WHY WAS
SHE SCARED OF ME?
DID I DO THIS TO
HER? HOW COULD I
HAVE DONE THIS TO
SOMEONE I LOVED
SO MUCH?



I HUGGED HER, BUT IT
DIDN'T SEEM TO
COMFORT HER. I WAS
LOCKED OUTSIDE.



I HUGGED HER,
AND I DIDN'T SAY
ANYTHING.



Trolley pusher

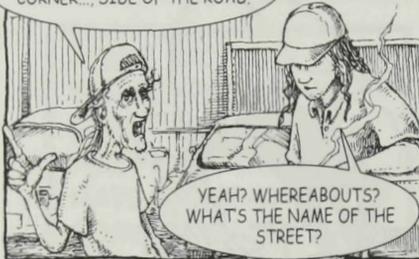
BY DANIEL REED

THERE WAS THIS GUY IN HIS EARLY TWENTIES WHO USED TO STACK TROLLEYS IN A SUPERMARKET CARPARK. IT WASN'T SOMETHING HE'D EVER IMAGINED HIMSELF DOING, IT HAD JUST SORT OF PANNED OUT THAT WAY.

LIKE A LOT OF GUYS WHO SMOKE TOO MUCH GRASS, HIS MOTIVATION WAS PRETTY LACK LUSTRE. HIS SELF ESTEEM PROBABLY WASN'T TOO FLASH EITHER.

WHILE THESE SORT OF JOBS DON'T HOLD MUCH APPEAL, FOR SOME THERE IS A CERTAIN ATTRACTION TO SUCH A LACK OF RESPONSIBILITY.

HEY! TROLLEY UP ROUND CORNER.... SIDE OF THE ROAD.



YEAH? WHEREABOUTS? WHAT'S THE NAME OF THE STREET?

DUCK! IT'S ON DUCK STREET!



HMMM, DON'T KNOW ANY DUCK STREET, IS THAT AROUND HERE?

FRANCO WAS THIS OLD FELLOW, APPARENTLY HE'D BEEN HANGING AROUND FOR YEARS.



HE WORE THESE OLD CLOTHES THAT MADE HIM LOOK SOMEWHERE BETWEEN RAGGEDY AND DESTITUTE.

NO! NO! DUCK STREET! D...U...K...E STREET, YOU KNOW, DUCK, DUCK DUCK!

DUKE STREET, YEAH I KNOW DUKE STREET, IT'S JUST AROUND THE CORNER I'LL PICK IT UP LATER.



* THIS IS A WORK OF FICTION, ANY SIMILARITIES TO REAL CHARACTERS IS PURELY COINCIDENTAL

ONE OF THE TROLLEY PUSHERS DUTIES WAS A DAILY MUSTER. HED ROOM THE SURROUNDING STREETS COLLECTING THE TROLLEYS THAT HAD STRAYED FROM THE CARPARK.



IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG FOR THE TROLLEY PUSHER TO DEVELOP A REAL DISLIKE FOR CARPARKS. FOR THE SHOPPERS, CARPARKS WERE A NECESSARY EVIL THAT YOU WANTED TO GET OUT OF. HE WANTED TO GET OUT AS WELL BUT IT WASN'T THAT EASY FOR HIM. SURPRISINGLY FRANCO CHOSE TO SPEND TIME IN THE CARPARK OF HIS OWN FREE WILL. THERE WERE OTHERS WHO HUNG AROUND TOO, OF THERE OWN VOLITION.



THIS ONE WAS AN OLD BIKIE. HED PARK HIS OLD BIKE OUTSIDE THE BOTTLE SHOP AND HAVE A COUPLE OF "QUIET ONES" ONE TIME HE HAD A FEW TOO MANY "QUIET ONES" AND TRIED TO RIDE HOME. HE CRASHED HIS BIKE HALFWAY ACROSS THE CARPARK AND BROKE HIS ARM.

THE STORY GOING ON ABOUT THIS GUY WAS THAT HED RAPED SOME GIRL AT A PARTY. THE NIGHT BEFORE HE WAS DUE TO FACE THE CHARGES IN COURT HE THREW HIMSELF UNDER A TRAIN. HE HAD A CARER WHO WOULD DROP HIM OFF OUTSIDE THE BOTTLE SHOP WHERE HED POLISH OFF A CAN OF BOURBON AND COKE, THEN KEEP YELLING UNTIL SOMEONE BOUGHT HIM OUT ANOTHER ONE.



NONE OF THESE REGULARS WORRIED HIM MUCH OTHER THAN FRANCO, HE DIDN'T EVEN REALLY INTERACT WITH THEM.

IT WAS THE GENERAL PUBLIC THAT REALLY GRATED ON HIS NERVES. THEY WERE THE ONES THAT ENDLESSLY CREATED WORK FOR HIM.

HIS HATRED OF SHOPPERS BECAME DISPROPORTIONATE TO THEIR MINOR MISDEMEANORS. HE WOULD SIT CASTING JUDGEMENT ON THEM LIKE SOME BIBLICAL PROPHET. WHEN HE WAS REALLY JUST AN UNDERACHIEVING POT-HEAD.



GOOD STUFF SHIT-FOR-BRAINS. JUST LEAVE IT WHERE IT'S GONNA SCRATCH SOMEONES CAR.



IF YOU COULD BE BOTHERED WALKING THE EXTRA DISTANCE TO THE TROLLEY BAY, PERHAPS YOU WOULDN'T HAVE SUCH A FAT ARSE.

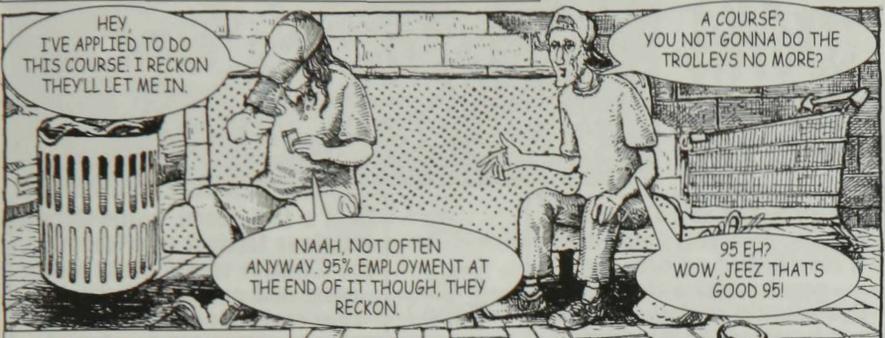


...THIS BIG NOISE YOU KNOW? LIKE ALL THE PEOPLE IN THE STADIUM YOU KNOW? THEY ALL YELL AT ONCE! ROOAR!

NO JOKE? IT WAS THAT LOUD EH?

HE DIDN'T EXACTLY LOOK FORWARD TO CONVERSATIONS WITH FRANCO, BUT HE DIDN'T MIND THEM EITHER. A COUPLE OF CONVERSATIONS PER WEEK OVER THE COURSE OF A YEAR. THAT'S A HUNDRED CONVERSATIONS YOU START KNOWING SOMEONE PRETTY WELL.

EVENTUALLY HE WOKE UP TO THE FACT THAT NOTHING WOULD EVER IMPROVE UNLESS HE DID SOMETHING ABOUT IT HIMSELF.



HEY, I'VE APPLIED TO DO THIS COURSE. I RECKON THEY'LL LET ME IN.

A COURSE? YOU NOT GONNA DO THE TROLLEYS NO MORE?

NAAH, NOT OFTEN ANYWAY. 95% EMPLOYMENT AT THE END OF IT THOUGH, THEY RECKON.

95 EH? WOW, JEEZ THAT'S GOOD 95!

AS FATE WOULD HAVE IT, HE DID GET ACCEPTED INTO THE COURSE.



I WON'T SEE YOU MUCH NO MORE SO I GOT YOU SOMETHING.

HEY MAN, YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO DO THAT. THANKS THOUGH MATE, THAT'S GREAT.

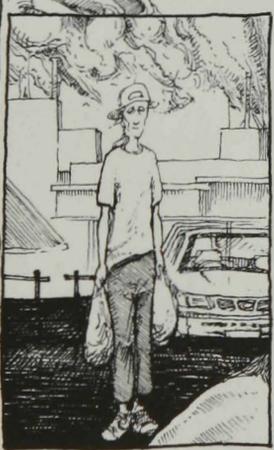
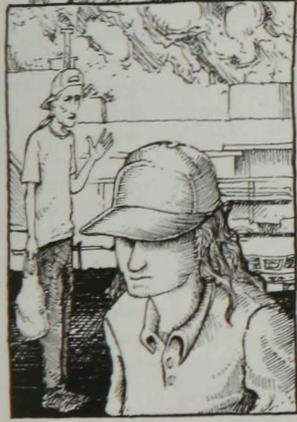


THIS WASN'T SOME CHEAP COLES BRAND EITHER. THE TROLLEY PUSHER WAS QUITE FLATTERED, ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING HOW NOTORIOUSLY TIGHT FRANCO WAS.



HEY LET GO OF ME!

WELL AFTER HE'D GONE BACK TO SCHOOL, THE TROLLEY PUSHER HAD BEEN DRAGGED KICKING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CARPARK, APPARENTLY HE'D BEEN PERVERING ON SOME KIDS.



FROM TIME TO TIME HE WOULD GO BACK TO EARN A FEW EXTRA BUCKS, BUT HE DIDN'T RUN INTO FRANCO MUCH IN THE LATER DAYS.

Fire Works: By [Signature]



Sept
2006

It all began in a Chinese kitchen, 2000 years ago, when a cook heated an odd, black powder over a flame. The magical explosion in his wok heralded the invention of huo-yao or Fire Chemical



It was only when this powder was rammed into hollow bamboo and ignited that people really took notice.

The Fire-Cracker was born



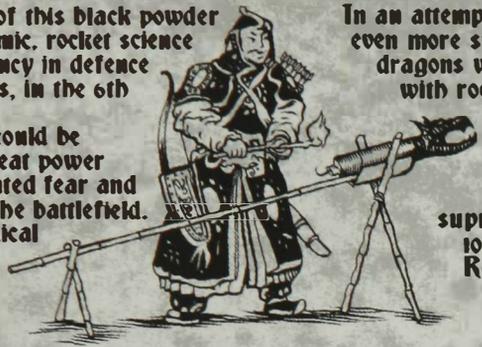
Be it a full-moon, battle victory, religious festival or celebration, the Chinese would make all the noise and explosive lightning they could muster. Fireworks are not only great fun but also a concerted effort to scare the hell out of any evil spirits that might be hanging around.



In these modern times, generations of children have been saved from the funnest night of the year as well as the customary visit to the hospital, (usually after fireworks are mis-used)

As a kid, danger is great fun and an even better teacher when things blow up in your face. Once fingers started to be blown off accidentally, it was just a matter of time before whole bodies started to be intentionally blown-up...

As the study of this black powder became academic, rocket science began its infancy in defence of its inventors, in the 6th century. Great thrust could be achieved... Great power indeed. It created fear and confusion on the battlefield. The psychological effects were crushing.



In an attempt to make this inferno even more surreal, wooden rocket dragons were carved and filled with rocket powered arrows!

After I had read this amazing fact, the thought alone brought forth the suppressed, evil glee of the 10 year old i once was...
Rocket Dragons!! With Rocket Arrows!!!!
 Rocket Dragons!! With Rocket Arrows!!!!

I became obsessed and had to draw this fantastic vision from my dreams



These beasts spewed stings from their gaping jaws upon the Mongol invaders when they tried to take China in 1279...

...To great effect!



Is there nothing cuter than a rodent in a rocket?



Maybe...

But when they are propelled at the enemy inside bamboo rockets you have **Rat Rockets!**

These bombardments made the enemy horses (and my childish imagination) go crazy...

Rat Rockets!

The great Italian explorer, Marco Polo travelled China eating noodles whilst staring at fireworks. He then introduced gun-powder to the crusaders who were massacre-ing away in the un-christian middle east. The crusaders returned to England with much gold, heathen souls and fireworks to celebrate with.

Hurrah!!!



In England, a Franciscan monk by the meaty name of Roger Bacon (1214-1299) discovered that by controlling the salt peter content of gunpowder, you could increase the explosive nature of gun-powder.

This discovery prompted him to hide his apocalyptic findings in a code that would potentially save millions of lives!



It was a couple of hundred years later later that European chemists deciphered the code and mastered the mixture.

Salt Peter - 75%
Charcoal - 15%
Sulphur - 10%

This ratio is still used in todays gun-powder

The Chinese are still famous for their modern fireworks, but it was the Italians that added all the colour Strontium Red, Copper Blue Barium Green, Sodium Yellow and magnesium for brighter, more intense explosions. Military scientists worldwide continue this quest for the biggest bang for your buck.

Fire-cracker night was never as dangerous as Total Annihilation.



Young Australians with a little bit of pocket money (before state governments banned the commercial sale of these weapons of mass satisfaction in the 1980s) revelled in the excitement of Bonfire Night. Letter-boxes blew up, bush-fires were sparked and kids lost fingers. The Nanny-State came in and shut the party down.

I'm no conspiracy nut...well not really...but i believe there was official pressure from the Catholic church to put a stop to the traditional Guy Fawkes night, a night that celebrates the failure of Catholic conspirators to blow up the London houses of parliament on the evening of 5th November, 1605. Effigies of Guy Fawkes and the pope were burnt in public..and this angers the church greatly!
 All I ever did was let a couple of firecrackers off, folks!!
 Australia is the only country that banned this great community event out of all the old empire's colonies.
 I would like to close with a tradition rhyme that seems to sum it all up...

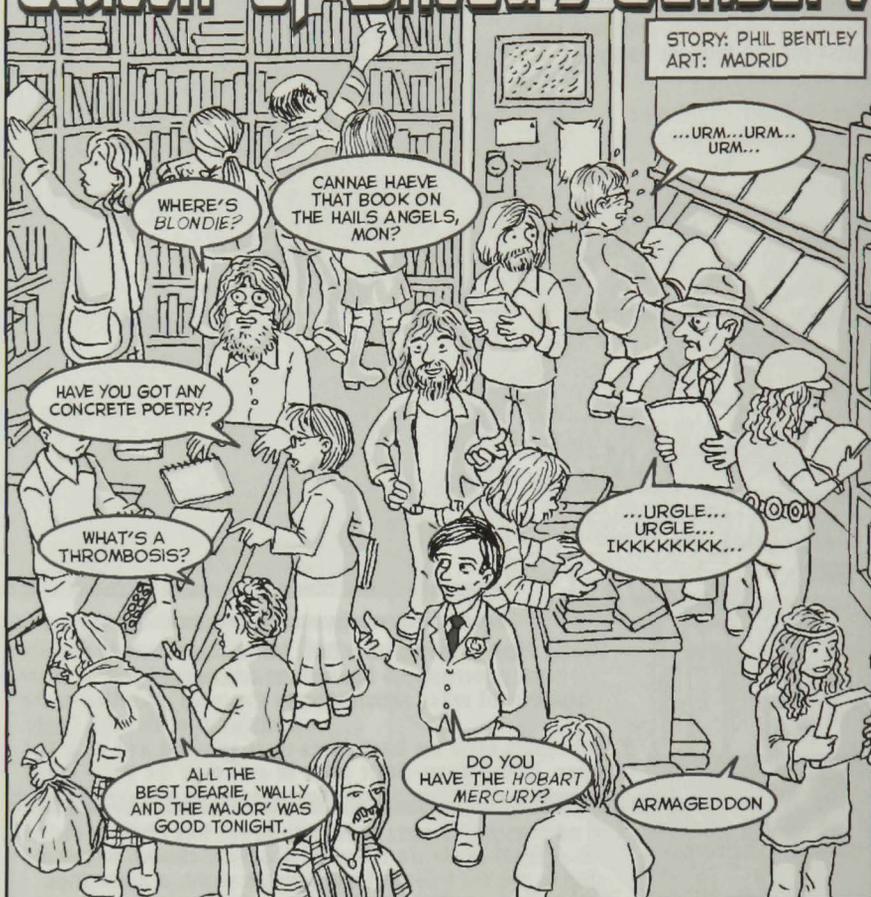
Remember, remember the 5th of November,
 Gunpowder Treason and Plot,
 I see no reason why the gunpowder treason
 should ever be forgot.



IN THE MID-1970S, WHILST WORKING IN A SMALL MELBOURNE BOOKSTORE, I CAME INTO CONTACT WITH MANY MEMORABLE CHARACTERS.

THE Queen of Sheba's Consort

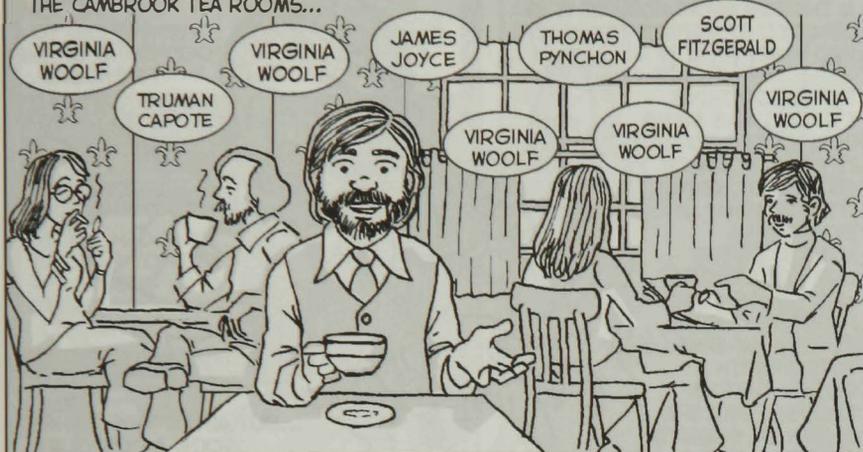
STORY: PHIL BENTLEY
ART: MADRID



ONE PERSON I RECALL FONDLY, BUT WITH AN ELEMENT OF WISTFULNESS, WAS GERRY, ONE OF THE MANY BOOK REPS WHO WOULD CALL REGULARLY. LIKE MANY IN THE BOOK TRADE, AT THIS TIME, GERRY WAS FROM THE UK, IN THIS CASE YORKSHIRE. HE WAS A LIKEABLE SOUL, INTELLIGENT, WITH A WARM PERSONALITY AND A LIVELY SENSE OF HUMOUR.



WE STARTED HAVING MORNING TEA AT THE REGULAR HAUNT OF THE BOOK TRADE:
THE CAMBROOK TEA ROOMS...



... AND THEN GRADUATED TO HAVING DRINKS AFTER WORK.



HE EVEN INVITED ME HOME FOR DINNER.



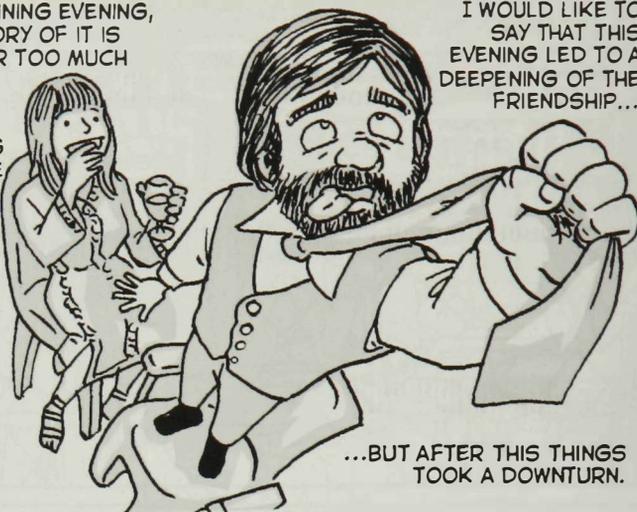
HE LIVED IN A CLASSIC
ART DECO BLOCK OF
FLATS IN SOUTH YARRA.

HIS WIFE WAS A VOLUPTUOUS
RUSSIAN WITH A HUSKY VOICE.



IT WAS AN ENTERTAINING EVENING, ALTHOUGH MY MEMORY OF IT IS IMPAIRED BY RATHER TOO MUCH RED WINE.

THE MAJOR THING I RECALL WAS BEING INTRODUCED TO THE LIFE AND WORK OF GERARD DE NERVAL, THE FRENCH SYMBOLIST AUTHOR OF THE LATE 19TH CENTURY, WHO WROTE SOME HAUNTING WORKS BEFORE HANGING HIMSELF WITH A RIBBON THAT HE THOUGHT WAS THE QUEEN OF SHEBA'S GARTER.



I WOULD LIKE TO SAY THAT THIS EVENING LED TO A DEEPENING OF THE FRIENDSHIP...

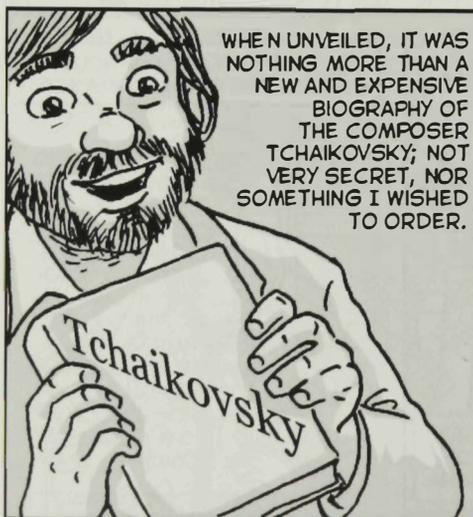
...BUT AFTER THIS THINGS TOOK A DOWNTURN.

SOON AFTER, GERRY MOVED TO A SMALL DISTRIBUTOR OF BOOKS ON THE ARTS AND I BEGAN TO SEE LESS OF HIM. WHEN HE DID VISIT HE SEEMED TO HAVE A HARRIED, ALMOST MANIC AIR.

THIS CULMINATED IN THE DAY HE ARRIVED PROCLAIMING HE HAD THE 'RELEASE OF THE CENTURY'...

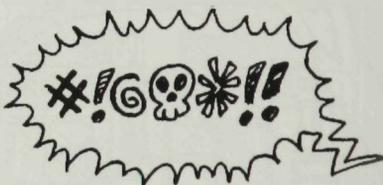


...SO IMPORTANT THAT IT COULDN'T BE REVEALED IN THE OPEN AND WE HAD TO REPAIR TO THE STOREROOM TO VIEW IT.



WHEN UNVEILED, IT WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A NEW AND EXPENSIVE BIOGRAPHY OF THE COMPOSER TCHAIKOVSKY; NOT VERY SECRET, NOR SOMETHING I WISHED TO ORDER.

IMAGINE MY DISMAY THEN, WHEN A FEW DAYS LATER THREE COPIES ARRIVED.

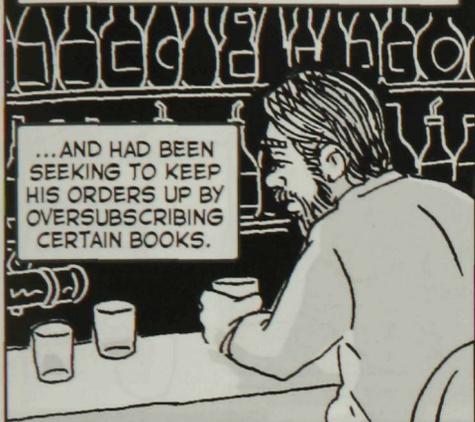


WORDS WERE HAD WITH THE PUBLISHER AND THE BOOKS WERE RETURNED.

NOT SURPRISING HE DIDN'T LAST LONG IN THIS JOB.

BOOK REPS ARE A PRETTY CLOSE FRATERNITY AND I SOON HEARD FROM OTHERS THAT HE HAD BEEN HAVING TROUBLES WITH THE DEMON DRINK...

...AND HAD BEEN SEEKING TO KEEP HIS ORDERS UP BY OVERSUBSCRIBING CERTAIN BOOKS.



GERRY'S NEXT EMPLOYER WAS A MUCH MORE DOWN-MARKET DISTRIBUTOR WHO SPECIALISED IN TRASHY NOVELS AND SOFT-CORE PORN.

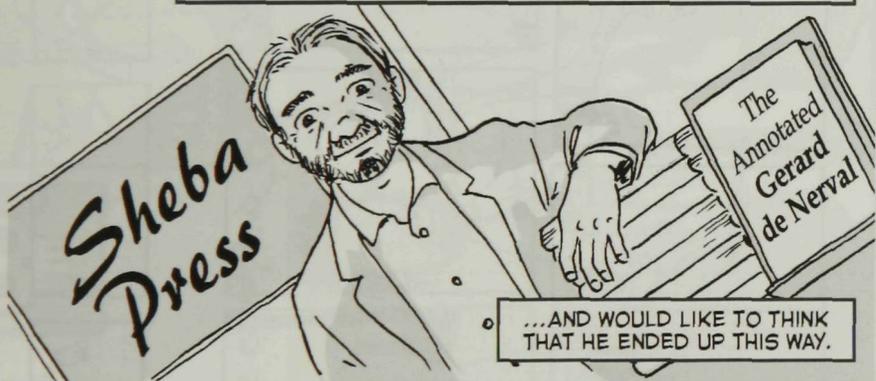
THE LAST I RECALL OF HIM WAS EXTOLLING THE VIRTUES OF "CLOOB INTERNARRTIONAL" AND "OOSTLER" MAGAZINES.



(A).

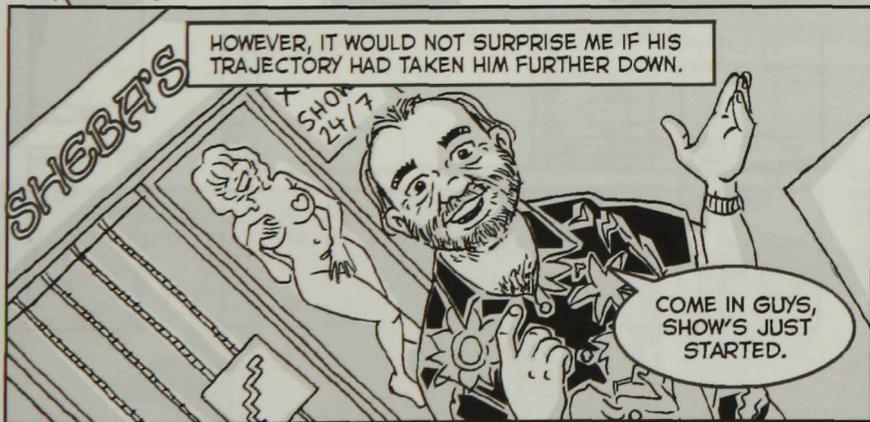
I LEFT THE SHOP SOON AFTER AND HAVE OFTEN WONDERED WHAT BECAME OF HIM.

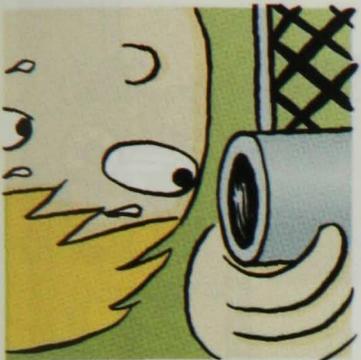
I DID SEE SOMEONE WITH HIS NAME RUNNING A SMALL IMPRINT IN THE COUNTRY A FEW YEARS AGO...



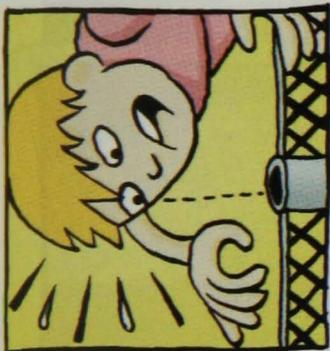
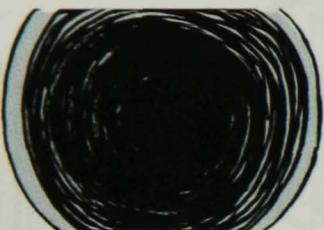
...AND WOULD LIKE TO THINK THAT HE ENDED UP THIS WAY.

HOWEVER, IT WOULD NOT SURPRISE ME IF HIS TRAJECTORY HAD TAKEN HIM FURTHER DOWN.

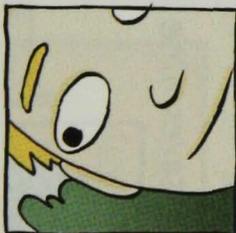
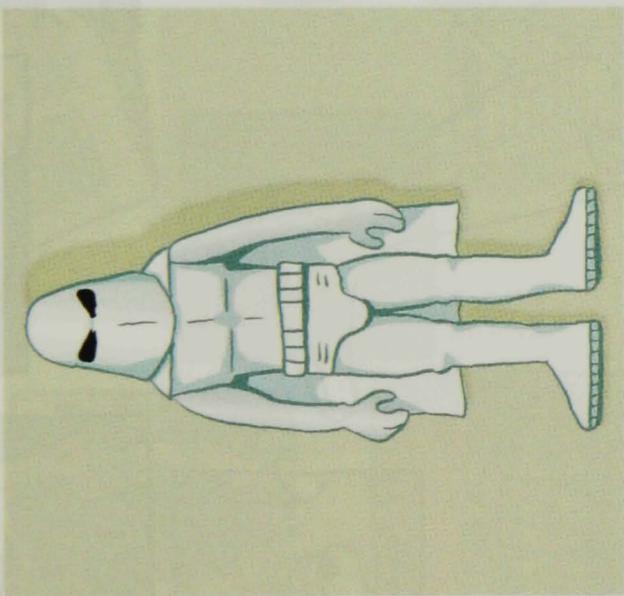




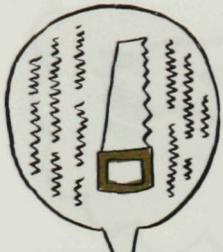
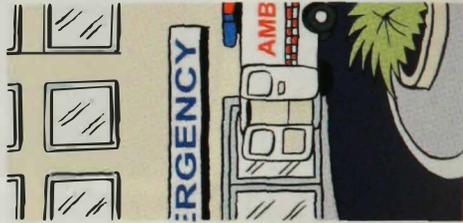
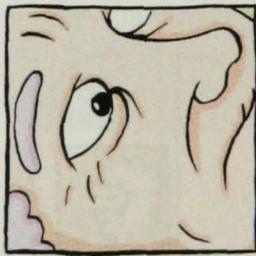
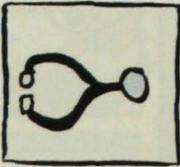
Yoo!
Wh!

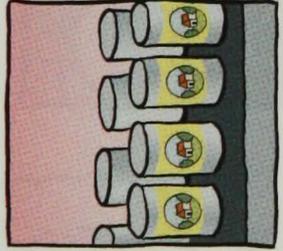


Easy come easy go...

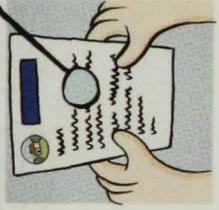


A stitch in time saves nine





A bird in the hand

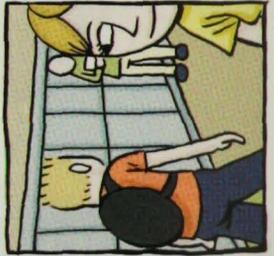
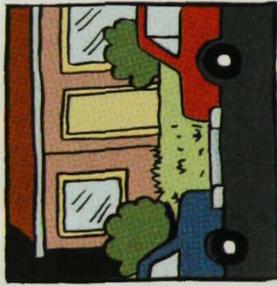
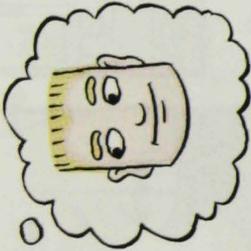


WE REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT POSITION OF EMPLOYEE WILL BE REDUNDANT EFFECTIVE OF TODAY PLEASE BE ADVISED





Kiss and tell



Hey Jenn,
are you
coming over
to Carlie's
house on Saturday?
her parents are
away



Shrunken Waters

Colleen Z. Burke

Gnarled
branches
of dead
gum trees
rise up from
shrunken
down
dam waters
fractured
with silver
riddled
with night

Curtin's Legacy

Katherine Fay

DAD SHOT OUR SHEEP in the makeshift pen, dragged them into the pit and dropped them on top of each other. If their legs still kicked he put another bullet into them.

"Just nerves. It's dead, can't feel anything now." He explained this when I stared at the head and legs of the first sheep because they jerked like a broken robot, and after that I stopped worrying. I helped him to pull the animals from pen to pit. Whenever I tired of that my best friend Suzie O'Neil and I zig-zagged across the empty dam and threw at each other the jigsaw pieces that we peeled out of the cracked earth. Mid afternoon it grew so hot we scooped the mud from under these chunks of earth onto our cheeks and forehead.

"Mudmasks!" we yelled, waving from the dam bank at Dad as he walked to the pit to catch another sheep. "D'you want one, John?" Suzie O'Neil said.

"Always very lady-like, aren't you two?" Dad had a habit of answering a question with another question. He squinted down at us when we reached him. The dust stuck to his face and made it even browner in the creases around his eyes and mouth.

"Can I've a go?" The loud cracking sound wasn't as shocking as usual. The shot went into the sheep's soft belly like a bullet into a pillow.

"Next time Jamie, never in the guts. Painful death. And slow." The older Dad got, the more he hated causing pain. The three of us stood and looked at the heaped bodies in the pit for a minute. The job was all finished but Dad didn't hum like he usually did when we closed the last gate or the woolshed door for the day. The sheeps' eyes looked the same alive or dead.

"Can we've a Coke now, Dad?" I said, pulling at his hand. He walked back to the ute and placed the rifle behind the passenger seat. He turned to face me but he looked through us.

"Hm? Not today. C'mon."

"It's okay," Suzie O'Neil whispered and nudged me in the arm. "We've got Coke at our house."

We helped Dad disassemble the pen. Brown patches left a rough outline of where the little fences had been and the ground was stained for ages after. There was no grass and the dirt soaked the sheep blood right up. I think it was grateful for any kind of liquid.

"Shit."

I looked where Dad was looking. A lamb was in the next paddock and it seemed curious about us in the way that lambs do when they can't find their mothers anymore. Somehow in a summer full of dust its buzz-cut of a woollen coat had managed to stay a whitish shade. This one was different from our other lambs, the ones we'd loaded onto the truck three days earlier.

"Oh," I said. "Oh." Sheep were stupid, everyone knew that, but I loved lambs. "Should we take it to the new farm where the others went so that it can have some hay too?"

"My Dad said when wool farmers put their sheep on trucks they're going straight to the dog food factory," said Suzie O'Neil. The O'Neils had a few merinos but a lot more crops than sheep. They wore ironed shirts a lot, and Dad told me their farm was ten times the size of ours. I knew Suzie was wrong about the dog food because everything my Dad said turned out to be right. If he said there would be a north wind and a bad fire day, it came true. If he said Eagle Rock was next on the tape, he was right. Once we did an IQ test that was on TV and he scored one hundred and forty four. That was when I knew my Dad was not magical like I'd suspected, but almost a genius, like Einstein or like his hero John Curtin. I decided I would like John Curtin too when Dad told me that he was even his father's favourite politician. I never met my grandfather, but Dad told me little things about him. Like how he would spread the fleece over the woolshed floor and stay up until three a.m. picking the burrs and grass out. For his fleece he won an award which I kept on my cupboard. Dad didn't stay up until three a.m. and he threw the wool over a rotating table, not the floor, but I knew he worked very hard too because he sometimes fell asleep in the evenings in front of the ABC news.

"Bugger it." He shook his head and seemed angry at the lamb. Maybe he was annoyed because the lamb might have guessed its Mum was in the pit. He shook his head again and opened the driver's side door.

"You can't leave it there, it'll die!"

He frowned and half-moon lines appeared at the side of his mouth. I think he was too tired from the day's work to argue. "Catch it and you can keep it. But you feed it."

Before I killed the lamb, it nuzzled the rifle barrel.

"It thinks it's the bottle," I said. In the midst of my hysterics and hot angry tears I kept the gun pointed down at the lamb. "He looked so skinny! And I thought he was dying and I didn't know what to do!" My throat hurt from crying.

Dad held my arm steady. He was still as angry as ten minutes ago when he realised I'd taken food from the fridge and cupboards in secret.

"But it's cruel! You hate everyone, everything!"

Dad's face went red like he was holding his breath and his words came out in little explosions. "What's cruel is watching an animal starve to death. Waiting until it's too tired to keep the crows away and they pick out its eyes. *That's* cruelty. That's just *weakness*."

In the corner of the enclosure the food scraps were curled up and rotting, half covered in dust. I'd spent hours waving that food under the lamb's nose but it had ignored the treats and sucked my little finger instead. What it needed was Glycoside but the box was empty. I'd heard Mum and Dad arguing a week earlier and after that I knew I couldn't ask them to buy a new box. Dad had sounded angry when Mum said that maybe Liam O'Neil offering to buy us out wasn't such a bad thing. "It's been a bad year," said Dad, as if that settled the matter.

"John, what if next year's a bad one too?" she asked. I was not sure what would happen if next year was bad. I thought of playing on the haystack on our own farm with Suzie. "You can be first mate. It's my farm, so I'm captain," is what she would say. I decided to help Dad even more often than usual.

"Go on Jamie," he said. I shot that lamb and as I watched it die I started to hate my Dad.

My second visit home from uni was just before the start of my second year. It coincided with the worst bushfires in half a century. I put out the spot-fires in our stubble and watched from the back of the truck as the trees in the next paddock grew orange billowing hair on top of their bodies that crackled and split. Neighbours said the sound was like a jet engine when the fire front swept over their houses. They crouched in their hallways with strips of wet cloth over their mouths. After the front passed they ran out outside and tried to put out the flames on their front doors, their rosebushes and their gutters with the black ground scorching their feet. From where we were poised, Dad in the cabin and four of us on the back peering out with stinging eyes, it was quieter than that. While my uni friends celebrated

Australia Day on the St Kilda foreshore with casks and the Hottest 100, I was a black face in yellow overalls. Plumes of smoke encroached upon the cyan overhead. Licks of flame jumped on top of the eucalypts that stood at the end of the stretch of blonde stubble. It could have been a postcard: Australia, January. I felt more at home than I had in the last ten years, a large chunk of which I'd spent planning my escape from the place. I'd nagged about boarding school. When that had failed I'd studied harder than the other kids at my country high school. If somebody asked me what I wanted to do after school, my answer was always, "I want to go to uni in the city."

We sat on the back porch steps and drank Crownies. I got the impression Dad was pleased to have me home, even though he'd lost three hundred ewes that day. He was the man I remembered from when I was a little kid, the one who always took a second before answering. The one who called Hungry Jack's "Hopeless Joe's" to my shrieks of laughter and who lamented the demise of the Sunday mass as the regional catch-up session of his parent's era, even though he rarely bothered going.

"When are you going back?" he said.

"Tomorrow."

He finished the last of his bottle. "Could use you on the truck again. Still burning over the far west corner of O'Neil's."

"I'll see."

"Goodnight." He patted me on the head.

The rains later that night meant most of the volunteers were stood down. In the morning Dad and I picked up the dead sheep using a loader. Sometimes the prongs speared the bloated bellies and popped the carcass. There was lots of dripping. "I'm never eating meat again," I said at least five times. That afternoon we fenced at a burned-out neighbour's property switching the radio from ABC National to JJJ and back whenever one noticed the other had changed it. In the evening we watched the newsreaders gush about politician visits and CFA heroes while the camera panned out around the charred hills and houses.

"Suzie said they buried two thousand today in total. Her place and MacDougalls," I said, still watching the news.

"Bet the honourable local member wasn't out there with her. Too busy smiling for the camera," said Dad. We heard a vehicle pull up. Liam O'Neil knocked and at the same time pushed the screen door open. He did it in the way that people who don't really need to knock do it out of politeness.

"G'day, Liam. Suzie."

"John, Jamie. Picked up a few today?"

"About three hundred. We were lucky. Jamie said you guys had a couple of thousand. Drink?"

"No thanks. Got to get home. Whole lot of burned ones waiting in the sheds. MacDougalls're worse off. Still another day's worth of dead ones there."

"Need a hand?"

"Yeah, thanks... Yeah. Just can't do any more. Can't shoot any more of my own."

Mum walked in. "Cup of tea, Liam? Hello, Suzie. How'd netball go last weekend?" Liam looked at Mum a moment.

"C'mon. Stay here, have a drink." I patted Dad on his balding head. "Suze and I'll do it. You men are getting soft in your old age."

"If their noses or feet are black, you've just got to shoot them. How's uni?"

"Fine. Fun. It's weird though, it's really nice to be home." Suzie reloaded and I dragged another one up the ramp into the back of the truck.

"Do you mind? This?"

"What?" she said. "Shooting them? No." She shrugged. "They're insured. Everyone around here's insured. Not really fun though, is it?"

"Let me have a go." I was surprised to feel a little repulsed each time I pulled the trigger. I couldn't tell the difference between weakness and compassion anymore. "What'll happen, do you reckon?" We looked at each other: dirty faces, blood on our clothes, shooting our fathers' livestock. I saw an image of us in ten years time in the same clothes covered in the same ash and dust. "Are you ever leaving?"

"Nope. Not yet. I'm happy here." I envied her certainty. Dad had never taught me how to leave.

"Let's drive past the pit on the way home," I said. I wanted to know if the bloodstains had washed away.

Windows

Sandra Hill

a cool change, we call it
 though on summer nights its rush
pumps the blood along veins
 of hot nostalgia
and beyond

from the oily harbour the wind
 sweeps through city streets
iodine tarmac petrol
 jasmine ripe gutters brine

windows open on memories
 the street we called home
flags of blue iris brown bird flying
 grain of roughwood a voice calling
 my name
the closeness of skin
 lightness of salted
dreams

all night rain clatters
 on the tin roof of longing

morning arrives
 its tender contours
 of clouds an abundance
of warm greys massing
 their bounty
above the building sites

Snake Died

Logan Jones

snake in the shortcut died, head by car-run flattened.
snake in the shortcut—midnight-once friend—died,
his end God-tailored to a white-fine point, a beak on him,
his own special fork kept.
his energy out:
forever coil uncoiled
forever spring unsprung
for poison ever again unpoised.

snake—of the darkness-glowing eyes and rings yellow
Nature-painted—in the shortcut died.
in the shimmer-light of moon my eyes sideways
darting watching fearing looking for
hidden him,
in our grasses tall among croaking seasoned calls of
swamp frogs mating each other—
by the base of putrid banana tree shadows
from nursesey pot-plants out

snake in the shortcut died—
by *hoarding buzzing guzzling gorging* greenshine flies
entered eaten.
two stones to cover him lest by some
ha! SNAKEMAGIC!—he should (of course he ssssnake after all)
be invincible and ZAP!

a-live-wire-a-bolt-of-electricity-a-taken-never-again-given
through him current run—

and he slither (oh torment of it!) back through shortcut quiet
someother mid—
sssilent-glowing—

glowing glowing night.

Ode to a Kangaroo

Mitchell Joe

You poo in my backyard and I eat you.

I poo
in your front yard, and
one day
the magpies will eat me too
and poo.

O kangaroo.

Koala Therapy

Phil Ilton

Our campsite could be a Tom Roberts,
your favourite painter. A hopeful escape
from your torment. Smoke shimmers above
the licks of breakfast's embers. If there's
a breeze, the ironbarks are a shield. The sun
dapples through crowns. Roberts' deft
brush has splotted saplings and grevillea
amongst the columns. The blackberry is
subdued; its alien tentacles constrained by
thorns of the needlewood thicket.

My back against a log, I float wishless;
a fleeting disturbance when I glance at
you, at your tight squat on the fold-up
stool, your eyes which I know are back
in the ward. The anti-psychotics only
blunt your nightmares.

Spat! The fire spurts a puff of ash.
Perhaps the morning's last dewdrop had
slipped from the overhead leaves.
Spat! Spatspatspatspatspatspat!
We bolt to attention as billows spew
from the coals. A tube of liquid
descends from nowhere. We jerk our
heads upwards. Its source is a koala
plumped across a fork.

Our cackles would make kookaburras
envious. Your face is a light I haven't
seen for years. That koala sure took the
piss out of your demons.

The Godfather

Jude Alford

NOBODY HAS EVER come here for the view, that's for certain. The lake is flat and murky, patrolled by birds the colour of smog. Fringed with stunted trees and faded grass. Metal seems to grow here, mechanical shapes emerging out of the shallows, cans spit up onto the wet sand. Silent, nearly empty, just them in the chill air. The clouds creep so low Bob expects their voices to echo off the sky.

He picks up a stone, weighing it in his hand, it's cold and grey-brown like a dull, shrunken pool. Turning it over, it's not quite round, and the best ones are never perfect. It's all about getting the timing, the action exactly right. One shot and the stone skims over the water, bouncing, held in the air for a moment. If he focused perfectly, maybe it could skip up dry onto the far bank. Not that he really believes that and there, it sinks, disappears with barely a ripple, settling on the bottom in a dark puff of silt. Like it never happened.

Nick watches, bundled in his jacket, smoking. His stance is narrow, his hands dart and he squints. Nick used to tilt his head back, languid and greedy, letting the smoke roll from his lips. Then Bob would glide his hand over Nick's and steal the cigarette, press his fingers to his lips, close his eyes and breathe. Hold until his lungs ached. Bob figures it must be hard for him to give up, because Nick used to smoke like he was in love.

Bob had managed to stop at once, when Marisa said the smell made her want to throw up again.

Nick crushes his cigarette, jabs the dirt with his foot, says, "I've gotta quit for real."

Bob nods, he knows. Nick has always made good on his promises. One day he won't show up with his dog and his pack of smokes, won't say he needs to get outside. The boxer runs ahead, flat paws slapping at the edge of the water, her head down, nose skimming the mud. The men follow,

Nick rubbing his elbows, sniffing at the chill. He turns in front of Bob and shakes his head fast, dark hair whipping over his eyes, down and back again.

"I'm getting fucking old," he grins and his eyes gleam. He's completely disarming, secretly proud. Bob snorts. Tiny creases are settling beside Nick's eyes and really, it does suit him.

"Hey Bob," he walks backwards, arms loose and playful, swinging his legs out from the hip.

"Hmmm?"

One foot behind the other, couple more steps, then he stops. Bob too.

"You know Italian kids, they've gotta have godparents and I... we were thinking, we'd like to have you." Nick looks steadily at him, his face faintly pink, and Bob thinks yes, yes. This is the least he would do. And the most he will be asked. Nick looks so serious Bob has to laugh.

"You'd let your kid get moral guidance from me?" He shoves his hand lightly against Nick's chest, "I guess it's relative."

"Fucker." Nick pushes him back, "You know you're like family, it's tradition, 's all. Like you'd be there for her, say if something happened to me."

Bob gazes over Nick's shoulder, at a broken down shopping cart, the dog receding along the shore, over where the water turns cement grey, nearly solid. He thinks it's possible, he could feel this heavy for the rest of his life. He wavers then speaks softly, "If anything happens to you I'll be gone too."

Nick blinks once, twice. "Jesus, there's not going to *be* a plane crash or anything," he grips Bob's arm, fingers scrabbling at his sleeve. He frowns and Bob wants to press his fingernails into the grooves in his forehead, run his thumb over his brow, just a touch, as proof. To say, there. Done.

"Bobby?"

"Yes. I'd love to. Really."

Nick's face relaxes and he pulls Bob close. Crushing his arms around Nick, Bob wants to wrap him up, stay warm like this, just the tip of Nick's nose a point of ice on his neck. He can't make a sound, even when he's wasted far too long trying to get a sense of things, turning words, feelings over in his mind, considering. How yes exhales, long and shimmering with possibility. No drops fast, deep and airless. He rests his head, his woolly cap lying soft against glass smooth hair. This feels mostly like yes.

Bella barks, crisp and loud, sending birds ruffling into the air. Nick holds him briefly at arm's length, mouthing *thank you* before they turn to greet the dog. She bounces circles around them, sloppy with mud and glee. Bob wonders when his idea of family shifted, how he became submerged.

They will come back, he's sure. Nick and Bob and Bella and one day a girl in tiny boots wobbling a trail by the water. Pudgy hands flinging gravel like candy. Nick won't be smoking by then, but if Bob watches he might catch him closing his eyes for a second and pursing his lips. Bob will be trying not to think about untangling time and fate, about sending his secret spinning over the water, weightless, magical.

Bob scrubs at the ground with his shoe. All the stones are subtly wrong, not quite what he's looking for. He curls his empty hand into his pocket and they start for home.

Untitled
Albert Rotstan

in certain suspended blocks around town
reached by devious lanes there exist the stencil worlds
where ornaments in enamel lie in stratae of such starry abundance
sistines of faience cloisoned garbage quick nifty acts calcined
again and again on the lascauxx of the street
door post verandah window wall and flagstone rip with sign
and script and the wit is written garulous wilful
a gorgeous oil spill onto so so rocks
in bright clothes for walking out
thats how the big smoke wears it
the trick masters guild of slick

it seems john perceval took one of his tug boats
from williamstown and raised a bow wave from a literate sea
that crested half the houses high and marked the flood
in glorious paint

May Day Mistaken

Klare Lanson

numbers jump from the white and strive to
celebrate the eight hour day of last millennium,
in a world where the trees hold buckets of audio
& panic with dripping low end buffer; it's the sound
that splinters time, coaxing tiny packets of trauma
into a corner to be offered as mind slogans; so that
13 year old kids can use words like decentralization
& inject themselves with the horror of rhetoric.

there is no need to improvise in a place
where shadows of skeletal branches have
given up and the leaves lay on the ground
crying & still we are unsure, waiting
for others to tell us where to now. loops
are built on the lines of over used language
sold to us as the next big thing & we
buy it like butter, milk & memory.
numbers are jumping we buy it every time.

if you repeat a mistake it's no longer a mistake
instead an entity which takes on an act of meaning.
the taps contain plum water the sky is full of dead air
(the taps contain plum water the sky is full of dead air)
passionate discussion of empty protest reaches a
crescendo. it becomes more interesting to engage
in minor calculation about thirty seven
different ways of saying the same thing.

televisual narrative is forgotten, fuzzy gore.
it's all about the speed & *the colour of the beans*
not the distance the light the subject the space
simply the speed & the colour of the beans
echoes of words spoken become voicewaves
landing curves of imagery wait for change & in
these channels we collide in factual recognition
forgetting that our existence is often mistaken

Ithuriel, Pete & Yehvony

(From the novel, *The Bowl*)

Michael Aiken

011295 1201

Ithuriel

He talked like a jilted lover, or a deceived courtier.

“Loss,” he would say. “Don’t talk to me about loss.”

And thus he spoke: “Have you ever experienced loss? Do you know what it’s like, to love someone and have them turn from you in disgust? Well, so do most people. But multiply that feeling by about a thousand years, and you’re maybe one tenth of the way to understanding my loss. What I’m looking for, no-one can replace.”

He dipped a finger in his beer and stared at the drops.

“See? Like these. That’s what I’ve lost—I’ve lost my soul...”

He blew gently onto the drops until they evaporated.

“Go, fly free, little ones... You get so many souls in beer. Especially the young ones. That’s why I buy beer, you see. Not to drink (though I do that not to look out of place). It’s because I’m an angel—wings an’ all that. You know how people say there are guardian angels? Well, I’m living proof of that. No, not like people think though. We don’t guard people. (Who gives a damn about people?) We guard souls. There’s billions of souls floating around the planet, and every soul has an angel scooting after it, trying to cajole it back into the creche in heaven. They come down in the rain—every soul sits in a drop of water, and travels in it like a liquid chariot in its wanderings throughout the Earth.”

He stuck his finger in the glass again.

“And some end up in beer...”

*

081295 1406

Chess

The kids made good use of the chessboard near the library in Kibble Park. Sometimes they used it to play Twister:

“Left foot black!
Right foot white!
Right foot black!
Right hand black!”

“Uh, ix?”

“No, fuckoff! I’m calling this game! Left foot black!”

“Yeah, but how fucking boring is this game?”

“That’s what everyone says when they’re crap at something.

Getbackdownthereaaaand... Right hand black!”

Or ouija:

“How is this Summoning the Spirits, #, huh?”

“64 squares, yeah? One for each letter, plus a few keywords—‘yes’, ‘no’, ‘ATM’. Now we just need a really big glass.”

And, at Nerner’s suggestion, they eventually took up chess on it.

071295 2302

Cow Tipping

“Pig, hey Pig, I don’t want cockroaches pinned to my books, okay?”

“Well you shouldn’t let them crawl on them then.”

“C’mon, we’re going out.”

Pig folded up out of the mattress on his floor, vermiform.

“Where?”

ix glinted brightly:

“A mission. Get dark clothes on.”

They crouched by a bin on the edge of the park:

“The cherrypicker’s gone.”

“So? You gonna drive it if it was still here, MacGyver?”

“Hey, I told you not to call me that anymore. I never had a mullet.

So how you gonna get up... ooh, look at the big presents on the outer branches!”

“Let’s go!”

They cartoon snuck from bench to bin, bin to shrub to sign. Nearing the centre of the park, ix snapped out his stupidly large knife.

“Where did you get that?”

“Yoshi gave it to me for my trip overseas.”

“I wouldn’t’ve thought they’d let you on a plane with something like that.”

“Neither did I, but the United man seemed to think it’d be fine.”

“And was it?”

“For a sweet little boy like me, sure.”

Pig had a black stocking on his head “to keep ma’ hair flat”. ix had a white canvas backpack The Number had recently sprayed “nuke America” onto. They were clumsy with energy. They were getting proactive!-ish.

The park was warm and quiet. No-one went to the shops around here this time of night. Climbing this tree in this park, this empty, randomly lit park, with its still pond and public chessboard, no life or dimensions discernable, the horizon immediately limited by the national parked hills encircling Gosford, ix watched himself from an aerial view, like Ayame in Tenchu sneaking into Lord Todha’s castle. He xed up to the lower branches, R1ed for awhile to get his bearings and L1ed to lookout as Pig scrambled up. A koi splashed congratulations at this initial achievement.

▲ing out his knife once more, ix climbed to the mid-upper branches and began cutting free the 10cm diameter plastic baubles. Just one more. Just one more.

Pig was collecting a huge red bow from lower down when ix dropped a bauble. It slinkied through the branches like a mouse, then leapt clear. ix hit ► for a moment. He readjusted his grip, wiped his eyes. When he unpaused, the bauble bounced as noisy as an agitated two year old, springing down the path, into the garden. Pig rhesused up to ix:

“Was that you?”

“No, I’m here. That was a blue plastic bauble I dropped.”

“Shh! Look!”

ix saw a gouraud-shaded polygon emerge from the shadows. His ki was on 58, climbing, but still “?”.

The polygon floated over. ix resisted the urge to theatricise a “nice night” (naahce naaht).

Ki at 80.

88.

94.

“Fuckdamn!” thought ix, “If I had Michael’s dashio, I could drop down and cut that guy’s head off right now, silent kill bonus points.” (Though a weasel of doubt shimmied through in pursuit of that thought: “If I don’t fuck it up.”)

The boys clung to the tree like sailors on a sinking ship's mast, waving in the breeze. The polygon stared up at them for a long time. Pig wanted to throw something. ix was amazed Pig didn't spit on the guy.

Time drag slackened and the polygon finally walked on into Spotlight plaza.

011196 1410

Chess

Priding herself as an erudite, Gosford Selective High School alumnus, cultured and all that, upon hearing that the boys had a chess habit in Kibble Park, Lila went on down to show them up. Only briefly perturbed by the house rules, she was soon telling them how to do it:

"No, no, ix, what the fuck's wrong with you? How can a nineteen-year-old boy possibly get kicked harder by an arthritic fifty-year-old hobo bum than he can kick back?"

"Fuck off, mole."

"What? What was that?"

ix could see the glee of the urban-myth gleam warming up in Lila's eyes...

"What was that, ix? You want me to take your king's bishop with my pawn?"

(By this time the house rules had been sufficiently refined so that modifiers were applied to represent the differences between the various pieces. Knights, for example, could nominate a mount to piggyback them, and both mount and rider were permitted to attack, thus translating to kicks in the shins and face for any un-mounted opponents. [The truly spectacular battles were the knight-takes-knight battles, which often prematurely ended the entire game in stalemate as each team became incapacitated and limped home (or back under the railway bridge) to play Atari (or throw rocks at the water or do whatever else the streeties did down there)].

In combat, kings were permitted to employ their bodyguards. ["C'mon, every king'd have bodyguards. They'd NEVER have to fight solo."] Thus meaning a pawn, for example, taking a king, would become one frightened bod attacking the entire opposing team simultaneously. When Nerner finally pointed out to them that no-one ever gets to try and take a king, the bodyguard privilege was transferred wholesale to the queen, the only modification being that the queen player was required to wear a plastic tiara, and if it got knocked off she was considered to be taken.)

"No, sorry Lila, you can't. We're playing angels versus mortals today."

"Well, let me kick him, then," Lila jerked a finger in Bark's direction.

Bark laughed loud, looked around, laughed again.

“You think you can take my bishop, lil’ girlie?”

Lila slapped her hands against her thighs, sumo-style, stamped each size-five foot and bared her eyes wide:

“STEP UP!”

Bark shook himself, stretched a little, then strode towards Lila. Lila gave a little skip across the board and yelled “Hiii-ya!”, kicking Bark square in the shin with the flat of her rubber sneaker. The Number covered his eyes as the impact made a tennis-like ‘chock’.

Bark sniggered, shoved Lila backwards by the shoulders with both hands and kicked a loose fitting work boot toe-first into the side of her femur, knocking her sideways. Lila staggered, her eyes flared.

“FUCK! Ow, you fucken FUCKSTICK! That fucken HURT! Boys, look, will you? That was hard! He kicked me really hard! My leg won’t work properly!”

“Bishop takes pawn, huh?” Bark giggled.

Lila slapped her thighs again: “Not fucken likely! STEP UP, FUCK-HEAD!”

Bark paused a moment, but Lila was sneering keen, so he trundled forward again. This time she skittered around his clumpy feet, got behind him and began kicking shit out of his calves—“Hiiiya! Hiiiya! Hiiiya hiiiya hiiiya!”

Chock.Chock.Chock.

All in a row her little red shoes pelted the tendons in the back of the man’s legs. Looking slightly bewildered, Bark pivoted, faced his aggressor, and kicked her hard in the side of the shin. Lila let out a small yelp and tumbled to the ground. Bark stood over the vanquished, raising his arms and chess piece in triumph

“PATRIARCH! CHAUVINIST! POTENTIAL RAPIST!” Lila shrieked, leaping to her feet and swarming a blizzard of short sharp kicks randomly about Bark’s lower half

“Ow ow ow ow ow ow ow ow ow ow,” Bark backed away a few steps. Lila followed, kicking as she went. A few more landed on Bark’s knees and thighs before he instinctively raised one leg in a shielding manoeuvre. As Lila kept on keeping on, Bark lowered his leg sole-first into the oncoming attacks. Three of four of Lila’s shins slapped into the base of Bark’s shoe before her body registered the pain. She fell over (again).

“Fuck this, you lot are fucked,” Lila sniffed as she clambered off the board. Sharon took her by the hand and drew her away from the game:

“C’mon, let’s go find Nerner. Boys are silly.”

060696 1947

Pete's Happiness Speech

"You shouldn't look so down, ix."

ix looked at Pete from under one raised eyebrow: "Really? And why's that? What do you know?"

"Not a lot, I guess, but I just think you should be thankful for having been in love, for having loved, and receiving the same in return."

"Ah, go get fucked."

"No, really. Look at me. Where am I now? Yehvony don't care about me anymore..."

"You were never together in the first place!"

"Maybe so, maybe, but I was still in love. In love, and it didn't work out. But, this is the big bit, look at me, ix, just look at me! Yehvony taught me so much—being in love with Yehvony taught me so much. I am sad it's over, didn't work out, but I'd much rather be the me I am today than the me I was before I met her, laid eyes on her. I've learnt alot about myself, and my own potential, thanks to her. When Yehvony found me, I was on the streets. I did drugs, had dropped out of school, no income. And NOW, well, huh hey? I've got nice clothes (hooks an excited finger under the collar of his NIИ shirt). I've got an alright place to stay. (Pete had recently moved into Pig and ix's sunroom, paying \$40 per week [they each now paid \$60/week for their own rooms] plus he agreed to mow the lawn each week, as Sharon's mum had finally realised her daughter no longer lived there, and consequently refused to do it anymore.) Things are looking up for me like never before. I've given up the drugs, I even know how to participate in the Jobseeker Network now. You probably can't realise what a difference that makes for me, for someone who used to be lost like I was. Now, I'm in contact with different Potential Employers every week... I've built an understanding of my position within the labour force—and it gives you such a confidence boost, don't you agree, to be able to approach total strangers for an employer contact certificate each fortnight? I never DREAMED I could be so assertive!"

210296 1346

Pete & Yehvony

"Here, you should have some of this."

There was a styrofoam box full of chips, flooded with thin gravy, and a small sandwich that the ants had already discovered contained some meat. Pete looked up at Yehvony:

“Does that mean you’ve forgiven me?”

“Look, don’t start all that again. We can’t have you dying out here, can we? Just eat it quick, so no-one sees it, and then maybe you should get up and go for a walk for awhile, or something.”

“You worried about me, Yehvony? No need, I can look after myself.”
Pete’s eyes narrowed, “Or are you trying to get rid of me?”

“You know we’ll let you stay here; just try not to be here constantly, that’s all. Have a nice day.”

“But I stay here to be near you, Yehvony.”

She was already at the door.

020396 1416

“Hey, Yehvony, wanna go out onna date with me? I got twelve dollars.”

Yehvonny looked past Pete to a woman in a suit, “Can I help you, ma’am?”

The woman held up a small bottle of orange juice.

“Oh, that’s good juice, uh-huh!” Pete smiled at the woman.

“Two-sixty, please.”

The woman handed Yehvonny some money and left.

“Aw, c’mon Yehvonny, it’ll be fun. Late night shopping at Erina Fair tonight!”

Yehvonny shook her head at Pete and began furiously rubbing the bench-tops:

“Thanks, but I doubt it.”

Pete nodded and shrugged, looked behind him.

“Ok, ok, well see what you think. I’ll drop by later. See ya!”

Yehvonny moved further down the benches as Pete walked out.

020396

The Date

\$2 each—bus fare to Erina Fair.

\$2 each—bus fare back to Gosford (at end of night).

\$1 each—1 credit each on Mortal Kombat. (“Or we can have four games of air hockey!”)

\$2 shared—split a coffee (at end of night). (“Here’s your straw. Sorry, there was only one bendy one left.”)

150496 1403

The Breakup

“Look, silly streetie boy, I know I’ve told you this before and you didn’t listen, but maybe I didn’t say it right: I don’t like you. You’re a nice

person, I don't HATE you, but you know exactly what I mean when I say I don't LIKE you, I'm not interested in you, even as a friend. And before you say anything or run off to that other stupid streetie man you always talk to, yes, that does matter. If I don't like you, there is no point in you being interested in me. Speaking of which, you shouldn't listen to that man so much; why do you? Why do you let him make you do stuff? What the hell is wrong with you? You're younger than him and just as smart, and nowhere near so annoying. You could think for yourself, if you bothered, and that's what really bothers me about you—I do hate that, the fact that you stay in the Dumb Street Kid role, let those other kids push you around, let the other streeties treat you like a baby. Look at yourself—what are you doing with your life? Do you really think any self-respecting girl would seriously want to go out with a boy who has no self-respect of his own?"

Yehvony took a breath, eyeing Pete in an attempt to ascertain whether any of what she'd said was having any effect. Pete laid down his aerosol can, straightened his clothes, smiled up at Yehvony serenely and said, "Yknow, Yehvony, I think that must be the most you have ever spoken to me!"

060696 1958

Pete's Happiness Speech (cont.)

"...And I just know there's a job out there somewhere with my name on it, just as soon as it becomes vacant. Maybe in telemarketing? No doubt about it, ix, that girl has turned my life around. I'll never forget her, nor live to thank her anywhere near enough for all she's done for me. I mean, for fuck's sake, I'm a valid, valuable, contributing member of society now! I participate! I've even registered to vote, and I'm getting a Proof of Age Card! You know those posters all 'round the place—WANT NO HASSLES? Well that's just right, and it's so easy! Once you know how to hold a pen correctly and fill out your date/place of birth on a series of duplicate forms and can remember how to spell your mother's maiden name, your life is solved. The world is my mollusc. All that's left now is for me to decide how I want it served."

"Fantastic."

"I'll say! And, certainly not least of all, I've also learnt how to pronounce the name Yvonne correctly, though admittedly I still feel Yehvony sounds far prettier."

*

030196 2222

Newcastle

Racing shopping trolleys in an empty parking lot, waiting for the night bus, the last bus out of Jesmond. Ithuriel needed to make contact with his superior.

“No, not god. Just an archangel.”

This archangel could only be found in Civic Park, Newcastle, and since Pig had recently moved up to Jesmond for uni, Michael and ix went along, to help Ithuriel and to catch up with Pig.

“No, Newcastle is no better. More jobs, and they’re happier about being jobs. More shops makes it look like there’s more to do, but I still have no money, so one shop is still more than I need.”

ix got a finger jammed between two trolleys. Time for a rest.

“So how did Ithuriel go?”

“Oh, okay, I think. His superior told him he’s doing good.”

030196 1917

The Archangel

“You’re doing good, Ithuriel.” The archangel passed a plastic jar with one hand, sucked on a Winfield Blue with the other.

He looked to be about twelve years old. Apparently he was actually thousands. Nice beanie.

“One more thing. I think I have a lead on your soul.”

Ithuriel was too world-weary to show excitement, so I was excited for him:

“Where? Where?”

“London.”

“What?!”

“Great. I hate London. They arrest the homeless there, don’t they?”

I invited Alluvial (that was the archangel’s name) to come to Jesmond with us, but apparently he was too busy.

“Yeah,” Alluvial drew back on his cigarette and exhaled slowly. “No no, thanks anyhow. I been out there lately already—have a look out back of Woolworths, you might spot my tag—but I got work to do. I’m not like Ithuriel and his mates, swanning around, only workin’ every now and again. As an archangel, I’m always on the move—gotta keep up the networks.” He sucked hard on his cigarette, then stubbed it out underfoot.

Ithuriel took a sip from the plastic jar Alluvial passed him.

“So what are you up to then, Alluvial?”

Ithuriel gave me a quick warning glance: “Ahem, ix, that’s not for you to know... Even most of us standard angels aren’t permitted to know what the archangels get up to.”

“That’s right,” Alluvial nodded at Ithuriel, “You just worry about getting on over to London and the rendezvous with Mercurial.” Alluvial punctuated the finality of his order by deftly snapping his skateboard up to his hands with one kick of a canvas con.

“Will do,” Ithuiel nodded.

“Right, see ya,” Alluvial held out a fist to Ithuriel, who obediently knocked his own fist against Alluvial’s. Satisfied, the archangel took a quick three steps and skated off towards Hunter Street.

The Emperor's Birthday

Paul Morgan

THE FLAG OF JAPAN was beautiful. Its very size was impressive, the red disc on a white background entirely covered the dining room floor. Mrs Pittwater had helped her husband shuffle the table and chairs out of the way, and now watched—arms crossed—as he crept across it in stockinged feet, smoothing wrinkles and checking for flaws. There were none. It was a perfect rectangle of creamy-white linen charged with a crimson circle.

“This is a real find,” Jim was muttering reverentially, “Something on this scale must have been raised over one of the big Tokyo Ministries back in the war, or even flown from a battle cruiser...”

She had always privately hoped that this flag, at least, of all flags would never be added to his collection.

“One day I’ll find one, Akiko,” he would always say, “and we’ll fly it on the Emperor’s Birthday!”

Mrs Akiko Pittwater hadn’t the heart to dissuade him. His face, so often preoccupied with work, lit up when he talked of his flag collection. It made him like a boy again: the young research student she had first known, excitedly trying to communicate the fascination of subatomic particles over dinner (while their bare feet conducted a discourse of another sort beneath the table).

They had met each other at the University of Queensland in the early eighties: she on a scholarship from Osaka studying Australian art; he beginning a lifetime’s dedication to the behaviour of zeta-neutrinos. A first meeting at an Overseas Student Society party (cask wine in plastic cups, a handful of peanuts) led to a second, and thereafter things happened with a remarkable swiftness. One year later, after a visit to her parents, they had married.

Then came Suzie and soon after, Jiko. The eighties went by (wiping yoghurt from the kitchen wall, bushwalking with a baby harness, tricycles

in the hall). So did the nineties (a skateboard in the porch, music yowling from an upstairs bedroom, boyfriends...) and suddenly the house was empty: one studying interstate, the other on a seemingly indefinite working holiday in Europe. Irregular postcards from that exotic, dark continent crumbling slowly into the Atlantic were examined and scrutinised like secret ENIGMA messages: "Who is this Juliette? And Denmark... I thought he was in Portugal!" Phone calls from Suzie were more frequent but somehow, eventually, inevitably and depressingly, the conversation would always turn to the expense of student life, and unfailingly Daddy's Girl would receive a cheque a week or so later. After all those years of yearning for a-bit-of-peace-and-quiet, for time-to-themselves, the Pittwaters got what they wanted. As in the antique curse, they found this an eerie, unwelcome experience.

Jim felt it particularly. His days were spent in the arcane study of atomic particles, entities which only a scattered brotherhood of like-minded physicists around the world understood. Their existence was even denied by some, including a French Nobel Prize winner who got quite violent on the subject at conferences. In this lonely pursuit, Akiko often thought of him as like a deep-sea diver—exploring a hidden world—while she and the children were his support crew, bobbing in a boat on the surface of the everyday world above. Coming home from work, it was as if he burst up through this surface, rejoining them in the here-and-now. With Suzie and Jiko gone though, it was harder for him to break through somehow. On quiet evenings, listening to a concert on the ABC, she would look across and see his mind was far away, speculating deep in twinkling subatomic structures—like a diver, exploring a distant, underwater phosphorescent cave. He needed a mundane interest, she decided, something to draw him up from the depths now and again.

It turned out to be another physicist who provided it. Jim had long known, but never yet met, a member of the "brotherhood" from St Petersburg (sending books and Christmas gifts in the days before the Wall fell). Meeting at a conference after the revolution, Nicolai had pressed on him in grateful friendship a Russian flag: blue, yellow, red, with a hole that might have been made by a bullet. (It seemed more likely than not.) The present had moved Jim, but it got him musing too on the very idea of flags. Through this chance gift, it happened that for the first time—and with his own hands—he felt how a flag could be a banner of war, a people's history, an emblem of woe, a vision of home, a work of art.

Akiko suggested it would be a nice gesture to send an Australian flag in return. Looking through the Yellow Pages they were amazed to discover a dozen dealers under "Flags and Banners" in the state alone. Jim

had no sooner entered the shop than he was entranced. He bought a replica Eureka flag for himself too (full size), then a Stars and Stripes, and the irresistible flag of Mozambique—multicoloured with a cog wheel enclosing a book, a rifle, and a hoe. Then he needed reference books on vexillology, of course, and even managed to search out a proper flag cabinet from an ex-army store. As he sat cross-legged on the floor, polishing the brass handles on each narrow drawer and neatly writing out a label for each (whistling to himself in tuneless contentment), Akiko was reminded of Jiko ten years before, playing with his model airplanes.

Pleased as she was with her husband's new interest in the workaday world, Akiko wondered if things had gone too far when she asked what he'd like for his birthday, and he'd replied with a shy smile, "A flagpole..." She had smiled back and said, "Why not?" but was frankly embarrassed when he started running up the Flags of the World from the front garden on their national days.

"People will think we're an embassy!" she exclaimed, "Or a Benetton shop..."

To her great surprise everybody loved the flags. Neighbours who had barely said "G'day" for years stopped to smile and talk about them. The local schoolteacher asked Jim to give a talk to the Year Nines, and a request came from the museum for a particularly rare one to be included in an exhibition.

"You wait," he would say with a grin, "one day I'll find a really big flag of Nihon Koku, and we'll fly the Rising Sun over Richmond."

And now he really had one, and really meant to fly the thing the following day. The thought of it flapping so publicly and brazenly from the pole in the garden gave Akiko a queasy, fearful feeling inside. She couldn't say anything to Jim, yet why couldn't he understand for himself? Didn't he ever see the graffiti on the drive to work? Didn't he realise how some people felt about "Asians"?

She hoped for a still, hot day so the flag would hang anonymously in a swag. By the time she rose, though, Jim had run it up. The great white banner with its blood-red disc waved in a perfect breeze. It cracked smartly now and then, as if to draw special attention to itself. Akiko made herself extra busy that morning. She played a disc of *Madam Butterfly* turned up loud, and hummed along as she did the ironing. The postman went by. The glamorous woman from number 51 floated past, as usual, with her schnauzer puppy. Two parrots quarrelled in a nearby tree then went quiet again. Nothing seemed very different after all.

"I'm just being silly," she decided, and after lunch put on her gardening apron and gloves, and took her basket out to tend the front porch

flower-baskets. It was then she heard the ute approach: a battered Holden, one door a different colour to the rest of the body, an ancient cement-mixer bouncing in the back, the whole thing encrusted with dirt and dried cement—it looked like a barnacled wreck someone had dredged up from the harbour and put on the road again. As it clattered by she saw two blurred faces: one tilting a can to its mouth, the other calling something to her. They drove on laughing and disappeared down the next street. What was it he had shouted? “Go home Jap!” replied Akiko’s memory, dutifully replaying the moment. She tried rearranging the syllables into some other phrase, something innocuous, but it didn’t work. It really was those words. She heard them again in her mind, and went very hot and very cold in quick succession.

“Oh Jim...” she heard her voice murmur. Akiko took a deep breath.

“Come on, Mrs Pittwater,” she thought, “Let’s get the back garden into shape. Even if those hoons drive back this way after work, I won’t be there to hear their stupid comments.” A few hours later she had just started thinking of what to cook that evening, when she heard the clatter of the builders’ ute pass by again, and then the dreadful, pretty, tinkle of glass breaking at the front of the house.

A front door pane was smashed. Below it lay a paper bag quite split open, revealing a stone, and oozing something soft and brown and stinking, unmistakably human in origin. Akiko ran upstairs to the bathroom and pushed the lock with her small, plump hand trembling. Later, she remembered with curiosity the words which had run through her mind as she crouched over the sink, willing herself not to vomit:

“This is a mistake. I’m an Australian citizen... This isn’t happening to me... I’m Mrs Pittwater... My husband is Professor Pittwater at the university.”

She thought of Jim returning from work and looked at her watch: 5.20pm. He’d be home in no time. It would be nice to stay here in the peaceful, tiled chamber of the bathroom. When the curtain shifted in the breeze, a cool greenish light wavered across the room and made it seem like a secluded undersea cavern. Tremors of nausea warned her she could not deal with it herself, not now at least. But Akiko thought too of Jim’s helpless look when he’d see the mess and then find her crouching here. The terrible guilt on his face for this dear, innocent passion for flags; his pity, and their shared knowledge of it. It was a thing which would never go away but lie silently between them always, like the memory of a distant infidelity.

Akiko knew she could not live like that. There was only one thing to do. It would still hurt him – that was necessary—but he would have to

hide it, and she would never have to see that pitying face. As far as Jim was concerned, she would never know this had happened. Now she had a plan. Akiko moved with a ruthless efficiency. Money. Keys. A mundane note for the kitchen door: "Gone shopping. Back soon! A." Through the side door to the little Nissan which she backed into the street, then set off for the shops. He would assume it had happened while she was out. He would think, "Thank God she wasn't here," and then he, too, would work fast on a plan to hide things from her. As Akiko meandered through the familiar supermarket with her trolley, soothed by the bland music and staring at the familiar packaging on the shelves, she knew these things with certainty.

Akiko bumped the car up into the drive an hour later. It was almost dusk. The flag had gone, and she saw her husband in the porch rolling up the garden hose. He was whistling to himself, rather self-consciously.

"Hi, thought I'd give the front garden a watering," he called.

As she stepped into the soaking porch, water dripping from the fronds in the hanging baskets, her eye went—she couldn't help it—to the broken pane.

"Accident with the hose," Jim said, "No problem, I'll fix it tomorrow. Ten-minute job. What's for dinner?"

"Fish!" called Akiko over her shoulder as she took her bags through to the kitchen, thinking at the same time, "Well Jim Pittwater, what a very good liar you are! I never would have thought it."

And she began to hum to herself Cio-Cio-San's wistful aria from Act 3 of the opera. There would be no more Flags of the World on national days, she knew, and the Emperor's Birthday would pass unremarked in the future. Everything would be alright now.

The Day of My Friend's Colonoscopy

A.M. Carson

Brutalising the day, machinery throbs; sounds so pervasive
they vibrate foot soles, prickle my forehead like a premonition.

The window-glass is not afraid but it trembles in its sleeve.
Seven men in orange day-glo vests and knitted beanies

cluster round a hole I've never noticed in the park opposite.
Through an opening no larger than a man they feed lengths

of white plastic sheeting. Their eyes nudge each other
as I approach. *New lining for the stormwater* they tell me,

when I ask. I must look puzzled. The young one picks up a piece,
shows it snake in a spiral, curve, join its neighbour to make a tube.

He sits back on the bench, grinning, hacksawing to size.
It must be cold I say, wanting to know about *the bowels of the earth*.

Too right love, we take it in turns, come up to get warm.
Ridiculous, we snort together; it's the coldest day in thirty years!

There's a wetsuit, khaki rubber pants with gumboots attached,
so it's wet too. *Do they need oxygen?* I say pointing to a yellow tube,

trying to visualise. *Compressed air for the tools, love, battery for light;*
water and electricity don't mix... he says, leaves the rest hanging.

How big's the tunnel? I ask them next. *Not tall enough to stand up in.*
We wheel a dolly to the worksite he says, stamping Blundstones,

clamping hands in armpits, cheerful in hardship and proud of it.
I can't imagine pay enough. *Real trouble's rain.*

For you out here? I ask, imagining them sodden. *It floods* he answers,
emphatic. *Oh yeah, stormwater.* Good humoured laughs.

By day's-end my house and I transmit generator frequency.
Like radio tuned to rock station we throb, emit beats when you touch us.

Knock-off quiet finally comes.
I remember my friend and imagine her relief.

Finding Utopia in the New Recreation Complex

Karen Knight

No more up to her wrists
in coppers of water
for this laundrywoman.
Patsy can take a breath
without inhaling all that steam.
She's been relieved of brown stains
to serve tea and iced vovos
to staff and visitors
behind the laminated counter
of the new cafeteria.

On her last day of bedmaking,
domestic staff presented Melanie
with a Fantasia broom, their names
and kisses all over the handle.
Now she sweeps up Jaffas
from the aisles of the new
three-hundred seat cinema.

On Saturdays, Eric, the security guard
from Ward C, teaches the male patients
to jump out of their skins on the new
gymnasium's high-strung trampoline.

Cheryl has cut the ribbon
of her new hair salon.
She's eliminated all crew
and urchin cuts
and she's slowly getting her head
around blow waves and soft perms.

The new library is manned part-time
by Rowley, the handyman
and Barbara from the office.
She wants to see more romance
on the shelves;
novels of doctors and nurses
falling in love
across the ECT machines.

Ecology

Vera Di Campli San Vito

Opposite the abattoir was the playground
with its view of corrugated tin roof and concrete walls.

On humid days, a smell like rusty iron
suffused the air for blocks around.

Children long jumped into the sandpit,
landing with a thud on their backsides.

Perhaps they caught the scent of gum trees or roses,
or of fish and chips from the shop round the corner.

The children never once saw a man
or woman walk in or out of the steel gate;

only a double-decker semitrailer rumble up
or down the slip-road to or from the freeway,

either rattling along empty or full of bleating sheep
or lowing cows. Three things are apparent:

the playground's been replaced by a block of flats;
the children have grown up and some work in the abattoir;

looking at the sky at night,
it's getting harder to see the stars.

Retreat

Kieran Carroll

I'VE BEEN IN SYDNEY for two-and-a-half months. It's April and the city is still at the beach. The nights are becoming cooler but the early morning sun still feels like January. The ocean temperature's at twenty-three degrees and soggy beach towels still hang on makeshift lines.

This room's always hot but at least it's cheap. There's only factories to look at, a few sick trees, a bowls club in the next street that hosts rave parties and lesbian biker gigs on Saturday nights to boost profits.

During the week the street is chaotic. Delivery trucks bombard the factories and the caf on the corner gets rid of pies, salad rolls and Big Ms like they're the last on earth—but after four in the afternoon, everyone clears out. I'm left with the hum of a generator across the road and a bread factory that opens around midnight.

I'm sleeping okay but waking early, but who wouldn't with the sun, the trains and the planes whipping through my skull laughing at everybody with a hangover? Frank, the guy who runs the caf on the corner tells me if you want to stay sane and healthy around here, do what he does and get onto factory times. Go to bed around eight-thirty, nine; get up at four-thirty, five. No worries then mate, he tells me, no worries, you'll feel fine. But I can't do it. I'm an after-the-late-news sleeper. I've been falling asleep with the television on and then waking at two or three with some infomercial blaring at me, at twice the volume of the news. This selling bullshit! Whatever happened to *Prisoner* repeats? They show the AFL matches really late up here, sometimes after midnight. I usually fall asleep during the preview! Last week on Channel 10, I counted they were getting ten, sometimes eleven ads in on the major breaks—snap, snap, snap. The brain's dizzy by the time they bounce the ball again.

I'm not feeling too lonely. Not like I did in Melbourne. One night down there, a few years back, I was at the end of a night, staring into a bookshop window like it was a TV. My eyes were glazing over the titles. I was in a state where I knew I should've just gone home but the other side of me was hoping something would kick the night along. Staring into the window, I noticed my hunched reflection, my round shoulders. To my right, a Scandinavian looking woman started staring into the bookshop as well. We both continued staring for awhile and I don't remember who spoke first, but a few minutes later we were at a pizza place and I was speaking so quickly, out of a sense of relief at having found someone to open up to, and she was doing the same. At that point of the night, I don't think I would have been able to find anyone in Melbourne to come out. Sure it was 2am Thursday morning, or whatever, but so what? So fucking what? When you've got real friends, they don't care what time it is. So instead I pour it all out to a backpacker. We only met for that hour. I walked her back to the hostel and we never saw each other again.

I think I'm a reasonable watcher of human routine. Loneliness gives you that at least. Since I've been here, I've noticed a woman drinking in the window of the local pub. It's one of those pubs that was just an old man's racing place: cheap sausages, chips, mixed grills, the air choked with rol-lies; enough to give you early touches of lung cancer. Then it went like everywhere else: slick teak tables, bistro menus, tables on the footpath, large flashy Foxtel screens. In the mornings, sometimes, when I'd go up the street for some groceries, I'd notice blokes tugging and cursing at the door wondering why it wasn't open. I've passed there at midday, at four, at eight, at eleven and I've noticed a woman who is always at a high stool; glasses of red piling up with cigarettes. She wears black singlets, knee length shorts and her shoulder length brown hair is often damp as if she's just been swimming. Every now and then I have a drink with her.

Jenny loves a drink. I gave her my address, told her I liked her but I'm not expecting a knock. She laughed when I said I didn't have the phone on. I feel like asking her what she's doing there so often but I think I know. She's like me, like a lot of us, caught in something we don't even know we're playing—hanging in, not moving forward, and searching for a new move. A waiting game, that's what it is. A waiting game and it's a game that can take a long time to sort out let alone win.

A few people thought I could have made it as a cricketer. They said my batting technique was right up there. As a kid, I was fearless, taking to the attack, prancing down the pitch, even laughing at the occasional bowler as I smashed him around. I remember one teacher saying: "It's never a boring day's cricket with you around Wrightie." Then one day, I lost my nerve

and gave up. I must have been fourteen, in a game with kids one or two years older. The pitch was wet and they sent me out to open. The first couple whizzed past my shoulders fast. One little fucker in slips said: "C'mon, Wright's as gutless as." I remember thinking before the next ball, I just want to get out and get off.

The ball arrived and I didn't offer a shot, clean bowled. I walked off, put the gear back in the bag and later that afternoon, I left all my equipment on the seat of the train. For ages, it felt good quitting. I retreated away from any sport, hung out with kids who couldn't even throw probably, listened to my first punk records, got drunk on Spumante and a mate's brother's double strength scotch (37.5%—I'll never forget).

But giving up cricket was like the first step to what I've always done—retreat, withdraw, shrink in the name of what? Matt Wright—one step forward, four steps back. And here I am, still doing it.

What if I was to walk out of here now? Never contact anybody ever again? Give life the full retreat. Go further and further and forget completely any semblance of family that I've got left. Never contact the brother running the Chadstone branch of Westpac that I hardly ever see anyway, or my mother in the big Doncaster house going down to the supermarket in hipsters and trying to talk to men half her age in city bars. She's even taken up windsurfing. And my father with his second wife, cosy in Daylesford, living on a massive superannuation payout and the new wife's inherited riches. It's not as if I'm the black sheep. Fuck no. It's more that we all just became black sheep to one another.

C'mon Wrightie, how about getting on a train this afternoon to some town way out there, Far North Queensland, look for some work, sit early each morning in the dining room of a hotel and get my bacon and eggs and three bits of toast with hot black tea? Take in more cholesterol than a truckload of grandfathers put together! Get a hairy beer gut that drunken old girls at the bar can pat on Saturday nights! Wind up with a couple of kids and find myself an instant family. Get back and build the nerves on the cricket field. Yeah, what about it? What fuckin' about it? C'mon don't just sit here and mourn all your lost opportunities, start afresh, c'mon go, do it, do it, let everybody in Melbourne know that Matt Wright doesn't need all the crazy bullshit that goes on there. He's happy, he's doing fine, oh let them know he's not the wounded sad dog they think he is. That he's over now his pathetic attempt at a marriage, that he's coping with not having access to his daughter because she's growing up in England with the ex-wife's family, that the twenty grand he worked so hard to save for a home doesn't even enter his head when he thinks of the long days in the TAB gambling it away. No, none of this matters now, up here in

this room with the heat and the whining TV and the AFL that always starts late, and the smashed phone boxes and the stray cats licking the street's discarded rubbish bags. None of it matters because if you keep holding onto it all, it'll really kill you and I don't want to die.

All the broken hearts. So many people under the pump. What've we made for ourselves, eh? What about all the people staring into bookshop windows alone at 2am? Stupid, isn't it, even backpackers waking up on the other side of the world supposedly having the time of their life, only to feel the loneliest they've ever felt. They're in Bulgaria or somewhere but they'd be happier to see a tram or a Four'n Twenty spilt on the footpath! What am I doing? I'm not saving anyone or solving anything big. How do I help the world? I used to give a \$20 donation to the Heart Research Institute once a month. I think about helping a child in Africa. I'll always help a mother get her pusher on the train or help a drunken digger hail a taxi. If a mate wants some furniture moved, I'll do it. Drive anybody anywhere as well.

When I went to Sydney for a few months as a teenager after school finished, I had a favourite bench. In the distance, I'd notice the Manly Ferry pass, the high rises colliding with storm clouds, the yachts tied to the murky water, the buzzing sounds of council mowers. Rushcutters Bay Park it was, tucked between the wildness and desperation of The Cross and the calm and wealth of Woollahra and Paddington. I'd often go down there around lunchtime and what I'd notice most is that the benches were often taken not by groups or couples but single people. Three, even four, could be on those benches comfortably but I never saw it. And after a time, I came to recognise certain faces, in their chosen spots, staring at the water, smoking or sometimes reading. Rarely would I hear loud conversations or laughter. That was always on the rugs under the trees, or beside the goalposts. Benches are for the lonely and the ill at ease. They put a hold on the world but I don't know how many problems they solve.

I reckon I was somebody that understood loneliness early. If somebody walked into the room now and asked: Matty Wright, are you a lonely man? I'd tell them: No, I am not a lonely man. I know people. I could find a phone box right now and be in there for a couple of hours. I haven't always been the best communicator, haven't always let my feelings show, have spent too much time pent up—but no, I don't think I'm a lonely man because I've certainly known people much worse off than me. This room, TV, my routines, it's not permanent. I've never thought of it as permanent, it's not gonna be permanent. I can let the world know that right now. This is just a waiting game, one of those years when I can't decide the next move, but that doesn't mean I'm going to go off the rails or get excessive with the drink. I've hit the dirt but I want to head back to the beach. I've gotta keep it simple.

I wonder where Jenny is tonight? I think sometimes I've fallen for her. Have I thought of taking her away from here, of us setting up a place somewhere in the country? Should I invite her out? Is what keeps her on that high stool what keeps me in this room? Can I change things? I should write a list of things I should do. I will.

I'll get the telephone put on. I'll start looking harder at the employment pages. I'll go out and do some food shopping. I'll join the library. I'll check out the cricket club. I'll have a chat with Frank at the caf and tell him he's right about factory times. I'll make contact with my kid, ring England. I'll tell the kid that I love her.

The phone box is fixed now. Yeah, I'll do it. I'll call Jenny. I'll call her up and we'll have a drink. Beers first and then a bottle of vodka. I haven't drunk anything for a fortnight. That'll be okay. I should buy some orange juice; grab a bag of ice and some potato chips. That would be great, really fuckin great. I couldn't think of anything better than having her around on a Sunday night and putting my arms around someone other than myself.

What My Face is Saying

Kris Allison

AM I ONE OF those guys who looks like they're putting on *the face*? Maybe that's all *the face* is, it's just wondering if you're doing *the face*. Like that's where it comes from. Like, cyclic. I'm not doing any face, I'm cool. Wait. Is what I just did then, is that *the face*? That flick of the hair, that slight tilt of the jaw and thinking "I'm not doing any face, I'm cool." That was it wasn't it? Look at that guy—that guy who looks like Charles Bronson, he had a face. His face said, "I'm happy! I'm so god-damn happy it's unbelievable! I have almost no private struggles. Things are free and clear for me... do you dig it?" Ha, I don't believe it, I don't fucking buy that shit from that silently-weeps-in-the-shower motherfucker! Jesus! Why do I hate that man? Is that *the face*—my masked contempt for cocky smiling Charles Bronsons of indeterminate ethnicity? Wow. It's sure a nice day though. I love the way my hair is blowing to the side today as I smile into the breeze, like a commercial, I am in the commercial for my own smoothness, motherfuckers! Don't fuck with this face! The correct set of the jaw—lips unpursed, but together, hair carefree, wistful—cutting you up motherfuckers! Through this footpath. You are all nothing! All I need is me! Fuck your face and die plebeian! Oh, so you have a cool jacket dickhead! Look at my motherfucking shoes as I don't look back at your forgettable butt. Read my arse!

Hey you against the pole, looking assured at things! What is your big confident deal? Oh I see, you're with your two kids, your well-behaved kids—you self-satisfied procreating motherfucker! Eat my shit! Eat my single wagging arse as I leave you on the concrete, happy man! I am on the road, concrete man of procreation and family! God! Not everything is about you!

Forget about this. I love people. Look at my loving face. I am on the bus, look at me you old lady with the shopping bag! You know I'm loving! I'm not one of this new generation of not caring! You know I'm with

you, that I don't reject you. You are old, I am respectful. There is hope for the world because I am young and I have values like the old times. You want your community back, I am understanding, I am respectful of that even though you can't have it back. That would be expecting too much, even though you are old and your back is bent and you are desperate for my smiling. I will not be liberal with my smiling, just a little portion for you because I am young remember?

Everybody should really know that I am special—that I really have their feelings, that I am an umbrella for their feelings. I feel you all. I am tender all over. Old ladies, and arseholes with cool jackets—I'm fly with that. You want to reach me but I am too universal. I am going home and I'm going to watch TV.

Porn, an Orange and *Beverly Hills 90210*

Emilie Zoey Baker

I had my first tongue kiss with Nathan Pager,
on his boogie board, in Brunswick Heads.
It felt like a baby eel, loose in my mouth.

We discovered a porn magazine in the nature reserve.
The smell of "My Little Ponies"
was still fresh on my fingers.
I remember the pages full of nasty orange faces,
roasted Barbie-doll thighs,
and mouths open like calamari rings.
These sticky pages caught in my throat
as Nathan Pager pashed me.

When he slid his hand up my bubble skirt,
I tightened my legs together.
I didn't get it:
Love is brushing Judd Nelson's hair off his face.
Love is some American TV show so far away from my life.
Tiger eyes, Judy Blume,
watching the storm wrapped in a blanket,
and my mother trying to explain war using an orange.

This is
Nathan Pager burping my name
out the window of the school bus.
His sister showing me her vagina,
then running away.
Becoming blood sisters with Maxine
through an oath and a pinprick,
then the whole school telling me she had AIDS.

This is
sleeping outside with other girls,
comparing underpants and fathers.
Becoming a born-again Christian for two weeks
then discovering hash and Jimi Hendrix
all in the same sentence.

This is
the taste of Peter Jackson 15s
and pretending to know what cunnilingus is.

This is
school, where I am flat-chested and breasts
are a jiggling double-pass to popular.

When Nathan Pager touched mine on the boogie board,
I felt nothing.
He was just someone else.

I knew what I was supposed to feel,
what I was supposed to look like:
all the printed girls that haunted my reflection were there,
head cocked to one side,
mouth ajar, eyes eating steak,
fingers curved away from the flesh to spare the fingernails.

But this is just me,
no film score, no Drew Barrymore-cute awkwardness,
just the sounds of our mouths giving birth.
No amount of kissing oranges could prepare you for this.
No hair brushing,
no tender moments that smell like a pink eraser.
No eyes,
no desire.
Just real.

I never expected it to feel so real.

Tourist in the Cloister

Gigi Thibodeau

Rosemary grows here—
smell it—
a frock with its buttons popped,
a hungry wooden bowl,
spoon scraping and clacking
against the arc;
every rub here against moss, stone, oak
is the only sex you'll ever get. Smell it.

It could be a hundred years
before you'll catch the echoes
down limestone steps,
the voice of a monk whispered
behind a hedge.

I bet you've never
licked your wrist
in prayer,
forgetting the words,
remembering your skin,
and again and again
the measure of the world—
the walls, the window, the floor, your bed.

I bet you've never
known the glimpse
of a woollen hem belling around legs
as they hush past an arch.
Smell it in the folds of cloth—
the muffled rush of a clamouring heart.

You sit on a bench
near the lemon balm,
hitch up your socks,
and pause before the next spot
marked on the pamphlet
with a tiny cross.

Catfood

Michael de Valle

CATHY WENT to the shop for cat food and brought home a stray. He had dreadlocks and earrings. The first thing he did was grab one of my beers from the fridge. Then he sat on the couch in my favourite spot.

"This is Tom," Cathy said, looking at me with her blue pleading eyes. "Can I keep him?"

"Well, you can't keep both of us," I said.

She sat down beside Tom and stroked the whiskers under his chin.

"Out!" I yelled, pointing to the door.

He stared at me with his piercing green eyes and sat there without moving.

How to submit to *Going Down Swinging*

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- Please make sure your name appears only on the Cover Sheet and not on your work.
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- Pieces should be under 8 minutes long—with a preference for works under 4 minutes.
- You may send more than one track—a max of 3 tracks will be considered.
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- Page dimensions for comics submissions are: 190mm (high) x 112mm (wide).

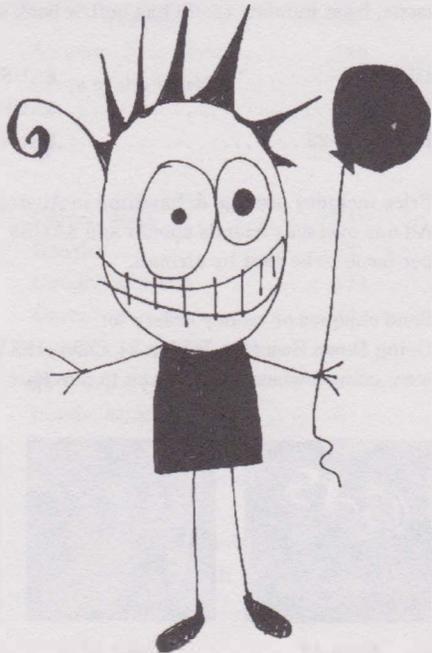
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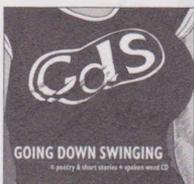
Issue 24



Issue 23



Issue 22



Issue 18



Issue 19



Issue 20



Issue 21

Index

A

- angels146
 - guardian146
- archangels156
- autobahn2

B

- Babylon5
- benzedrine 28, 29, 30
- boogie board182
- branches, gnarled129
- Bronson, Charles180
- Buddha17
 - not really27
- Bunjil32

C

- Cartland, Barbara8
- certificate of superiority91
- cheese69
- cherub22
- Chinese doctor68
- cigarette/s
 - and bugs93
 - endless173
 - Malboro Reds7, 30
 - Peter Jackson 15s184
 - quitting139
 - Winfield Blue154
- cows46-8
- Cube*49

D

- Darin, Bobby4
- Disney72-77
- divers, scuba67
- drawing borg74

E

- ECT165, 173
- Elvis31
- Everton, J. Mulligan42
- Exile on Main Street*17

F

- fear
 - death89
 - the void89
- figurine, *Star Wars*125
- Flags of the World159, 161

G

- Glover, John142
- Google53
- Gough, Whitlam121
- Guernica*44

H

- hands, lumberjack's2
- hash, Afghani black172
- Hawke, Robert James Lee18
- heart
 - shaped heads103
 - playing with16
 - skipping15

H (cont.)

- hippies, stealing girlfriend . . .185
hologram1
horseshoe, glowing21

I

- iPod142

K

- kangaroos137
koala138

L

- Lennox, Annie16
Lifestylings42
lizard
 chameleon26
 Tokay gecko14

M

- MacGyver147
monkey70
mynah, pan-Asiatic4

N

- Nelson, Judd182
nuts69

P

- paedophile?69–71
Perceval, John145
Pitney, Gene4
Prisoner167
protesters11

R

- rat rockets118
Roberts, Tom138

S

- saboteurs38
silences, an infestation of . . .33
Spears, Britney8
Spumante169

T

- terrorist/s34–5
tram/s80–84

W

- Woolf, Virginia121
Woomera Detention Centre . .6
words, forgotten32

Autographs

The end.

QUESTION?

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ANSWER?

- a. Fenella Kernebone
- b. Ivor Indyk
- c. Nick Earls
- d. John Kinsella
- e. Bob Holman
- f. Michael de Valle
- g. All of the above?

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