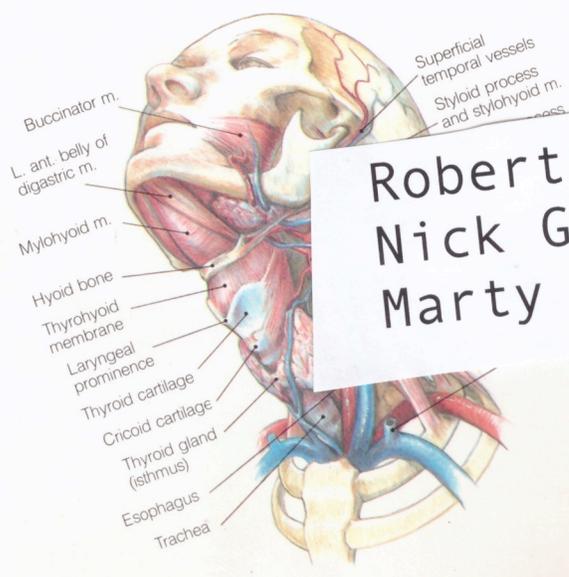


totally
normal
magazine

DEEP STRUCTURES



Robert Dean
Nick Gaudio
Marty Shambles

Editor's Note:

This is a totally normal magazine wherein nothing untoward occurs. You're encouraged to read it in churches, police stations, public transit centers, and fast-casual eateries. You're best to avoid the ASPCA, however, as this magazine tends to upset rescue animals.

What follow are stories of harrows and triumph, apple pie and baseball, serious people doing serious things.

You will not find the shocking filth that parades through the media like Lady Godiva.

When you are finished with this totally normal magazine, pass it on to another upstanding person of merit.

It's your totally normal duty to spread these gospels far and wide.

Woe be to those who neither read nor share this magazine.

Have a normal one,

The Editor

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THE BRAIN

BASE OF BRAIN — ORIGIN OF CRANIAL NERVES

CRANIAL NERVES:

- OLFACTORY NERVE I.
- OPTIC NERVE II.
- OCULOMOTOR NERVE III.
- TROCHLEAR NERVE IV.
- TRIGEMINAL NERVE V.

- EYEBALL
- OLFACTORY BULB
- FRONTAL LOBE
- OPTIC CHIASMA
- HYPOPHYSAL STALK
- LATERAL OLFACTORY STRIA
- TUBER CINEREUM
- MAMMILLARY BODIES
- OPHTHALMIC DIVISION OF TRIGEMINAL NERVE
- MAXILLARY NERVE
- MANDIBULAR NERVE
- PONS
- TEMPORAL LOBE
- MEDULLA OBLONGATA
- VERTEBRAL COLUMN
- SPINAL NERVE
- AXIS
- STERNUM



LIFE

POSTERIOR COMMUNICATING ARTERY

MANDIBULAR NERVE

SUPERIOR CEREBELLAR ARTERY

PONTINE ARTERY

BASILAR ARTERY

PONS

MEDULLA OBLONGATA

ANTERIOR SPINAL ARTERY

VERTEBRAL ARTERY

SPINAL CORD

TROCHLEAR NERVE IV.

TEMPORAL LOBE

POSTERIOR CEREBRAL ARTERY

TRIGEMINAL NERVE V.

ABDUCENS NERVE VI.

FACIAL NERVE VII.

VESTIBULO-COCHLEAR NERVE VIII.

GLOSSOPHARYNGEAL NERVE IX.

VAGUS NERVE X.

ACCESSORY NERVE XI.

HYPGLOSSAL NERVE XII.

MOTOR ACTIVITY

SOMATOTOPIC ORGANIZATION

LEFT TRANSVERSE GYRUS

Ypsilanti

By Nick Gaudio

A woman named Millie wrote to me every week for two years. Then, out of the blue, she admitted she didn't actually work at a law firm in Detroit.

No, I star in low-budget pornographic films out of a basement studio in a small suburb outside the city.

I rubbed my eyes.

It's some place called "Ypsilanti," she wrote.

I looked up Ypsilanti on Wikipedia after I read the rest of her letter, and then after some time passed, I returned to her words to scrutinize them.

I'm not just a NORMAL actress, she wrote in blue pen, but one who does unseemly things. I do pornography. She had underlined, in a red pen, the word NORMAL and then in a green pen, pornography.

This suggested two things to me:

1. She kept different colors of pen around (something I wouldn't have expected for a porn star); and
2. She'd likely re-read, then edited, her letter.

That nuance – that little pathetic touch – stirred something in my heart, so in my reply I asked Millie, Well, have you been in anything I've seen?

She wrote, Not unless you have very certain kinks or fetishes. I wondered: Do I? Then considered no, I do not. I wrote, I do not have any kinks or fetishes.

After expressing relief that I seemingly accepted her profession, Millie signed the next letter without her name, but with the same loopy flourish she reserved for her signature:

– M.

P.S.: Now, then, I must be truly honest: I love you.

Always one for a grand gesture myself, I wrote to Millie, the gist being: You must tell me you love me to my face. You must come here and live with me in Baltimore.

I waited for the mail every day like a dog. I'd of course had my doubts about Millie. How truthful she'd been with me. (Nobody terrifically uncomplicated chooses to fall in love with a man like me). There were often fat water stains on her letters where she'd no doubt wept onto the ink. The longer I waited, the less my doubts mattered.

Millie finally responded: I don't have the money for travel.

Inside was a picture of an empty black faux-leather purse.

Of course, I didn't have the money to lend her. I wrote, Maybe someday in the future.

Maybe never, she responded.

And then, of course, never happened.

My whole heart thickened. By that I mean it gained a certain... viscosity. It felt... hard to move. I took to drinking heavily,

whole bottles of gin alone, too quickly, then I stopped altogether. I went to the harbor to gather my thoughts. I sat on the pier. Many long days passed. I began to hate myself in a distant, anxious, and unfamiliar way.

One day, a woman cozied up to me on the wood planks. She was wearing a pair of brown corduroy pants, an orange tube top, and brassy hoop earrings. A glide of ducks – they must've known her – drifted in. She pulled from her massive purse a whole loaf of cheap unsliced white bread, held it for me to see then ritualistically shook the bag open over the water. She took off her shoes and asked me if I'd ever seen her around. I could smell her feet, which weren't altogether terrible. Just salty. No, I said. Why would I? Why would I have seen you around? I'm a prostitute, she said pointing to the sharpness of her own chin.

I watched the ducks desperately attack the sinking boat-hull of bread.

My name is Ramona, she said.

You shouldn't feed them bread, I said. It's bad for them.

We sat in a great and burdensome silence, one particular to people who fundamentally disagree on ducks and bread, but also on the state of the universe. The birds honked at each other miserably as the bread took on water and sank into the Chesapeake.

Have you ever seen these ducks fuck? Ramona asked me, to her this was a philosophical question.

Fuck?

Like really go at it.

No, I don't think so.

That's what I come here for, she said. She slid closer. After they eat like this, they fuck.

Ramona put her hand in the crook of my back and traced it softly down to the tag of my blue jeans. It's brutal.

Brutal?

With the hook of her two fingers, she tugged the back lip of my jeans. Watch them, she said. Watch.

*

In a matter of ten minutes, the drake was standing on top of a hen, pressing down, kneading his feet into her plumage as she tried to swim away.

His beak gripped at the back of her neck. She protested, then broke free. They both were forced, now by the natural order of things, to continue this grotesque struggle on a hillside farthest from the pier, all of it lined with the cattails of the Chesapeake.

Oh my, I said. I watched Ramona's sun-tanned legs.

The drake followed the hen behind a curtain of marshland grasses. Every now and then between the cattails' sway, I'd see a flash of their barbaric ritual. I could hear their honking, the drake's badgering and I hated myself – my notions of this whole world – this time very intimately.

Unseemly things, I thought.

A single feather of the drake drifted in the air from the melee.

Caught by the wind, it drifted high and then low.

I followed the wispy thing with my eyes until I couldn't see it for the waves.

*

I fucked Ramona – not so much like a duck, I should say– the next night in a hotel by the harbor. She assured me she orgasmed quietly. I told her there was a certain power in that. I didn't know if I could trust her. No no it was great, she assured me, with no real interest in being enthusiastic enough to be believable.

We ate some bread in the hotel's narrow bed, tearing off chunks of it like vikings after a raid.

After we put on our clothes, she charged me, of course, but stayed after we both had put on our shoes. My father was in the military, Ramona explained, that's why I do this.

I have a constant fear of drowning, I admitted, doodling on the little notepad the hotel had kept for this very purpose on the desk. Yet... there's this paradoxically almost-sexual attraction to water.

Water?

Yes.

That's what does it for you?

Maybe that's my kink, I said – a little joke to myself.

*

When I was alone, I sat on the pier with my own pens and some blank stationery over-thinking my next response to my porno actress. I sat there softly humming to myself, as not to hear the deathly lapping of waves against the pier's braces.

Soon, I told Ramona I'd like to call her Millie. She balked, standing hand-to-hip in the hotel room with her huge purse still wrapped over her shoulder. She said she was very attached to her own name. Because of its inherent I dunno eccentricity, she said. All my life I've been Ramona. Ramona-Ramona-Ramona.

I offered to pay her a little more for the new debasement.

No no, let's try it your way, she said. I'm curious how – how it feels.

I sat on the stiff hotel bed and folded my hands into my lap. Ramona unfastened the top button on her blouse. I'm Millie and I'm taking off my shirt, she said. I'm Millie and I'm removing my buttons.

Not like that, I said. Not like that.

*

One morning weeks later a letter arrived, this one with an address from Ypsilanti. Goodbye, Millie wrote, but in case you were wondering here are two pictures of me attached.

One photo showed a smiling slight-framed blonde woman leaning against a brick wall, looking coyly into the sky like an oracle. The other photo – perhaps, out of spite – was obscenely pornographic.

I combed my memory and then decided: In no context had I ever seen this woman before. This realization was met, somehow, in equal parts relief and pain.

*

That evening on the pier, the thought occurred to me that the pens, the paper, the envelopes, the stamps, the photos, the staples, the paperclips, the trace of tasteful perfume, everything Millie had used to write me had been acquired with ill-gotten gains.

Is your name even Millie, I finally wrote.

I could hardly put a question mark on the letter before Ramona arrived for our daily meeting. So she wouldn't see, I tossed my letter in the harbor among the hungry, expectant ducks, a few of which inspected the paper and left it float flatly on the water, until they left it alone.

What was that? Ramona asked me, jealous of my life outside of the pier.

Nothing, I said.

We sat silently, still much in disagreement about the state of the universe, and watched a pair of college kids – a boy, a girl – laugh as they struggled to steer an obstinate, taffy-colored paddleboat back to the pier.

The college kids, frustrated with their vessel, stopped paddling altogether. They embraced, maybe for the first time, their arms twisted into each in a sick and emotionless Kabuki play – one, maybe, of necessity.

The sun became a wan prop.

I put my hand on the prostitute's bare knee.

Want to feed them this time, Ramona asked. She reached in her purse for the bread.

The dark bay water glistened a gelatinous gold with the lights from the hotel nearby.

Sure, I told this woman. I guess I'd like that.

The Wretch

By Marty Shambles
t:@MartyShambles

The particles of dust and smoke are jolted from their lazy drift by the light – a single beam from the window, turning something shiftless into something exact. An angle, an illumination, falling directly into my sleeping eyelid.

The Fear and Loathing DVD menu is playing on a loop. I am finding my way back to the world. There was a dream. Something about repetition. There was an audio device that wouldn't stop. My eyes open. I see the Bob Marley poster. Bob, benevolent, doesn't judge the wretched state I feel. The headache. The stomach. The depression.

"Wake up, asshole." Tom is sitting in his gaming chair, fucking with his phone.

I attempt to peer into the abyss of last night's memory to figure out why I'm here. There was a bar. Everclear was the

special. I pissed somewhere I shouldn't have. There were words, but with whom? With Tom?

"Dude, I feel like shit." I sit up and reach into my pocket for smokes. There's half a Pall Mall 100 in there. I light it up.

"You puked in my car again, dude. I'm pretty pissed about it."

"Fuck, dude. Shit, I'm sorry man."

"You've gotta clean it up. I fucking told you last time that if it happened again, you're cleaning it up."

"Yeah. Of course. I will definitely clean it up."

"Now."

I ash my cigarette in an empty beer can, the bit of fire left in the ash is snuffed out by the beer, making a sound like hush. My hand shakes on the way to the can.

"Yeah dude definitely. Do you have a beer to even me out? I'll go out there right now and clean up my mess."

Tom looks like he's about to tell me to go fuck myself, but then his face is awash in pity--scornful pity.

"Dude... no."

Flashes of the night pour in. I was dancing. I made people uncomfortable. I drank Lone Star on the street with some punks. I poured beer on a Mercedes and recited poetry while standing on the trunk. I called Tom to pick me up. I cried that I'm sorry I'm like this in the backseat as Tom drove, silent.

A heavy stone of guilt settles in my chest, above my writhing stomach. "I'm so sorry, bro. I'm sorry to do this to you again. If there's anything else I can--"

"Just clean the car."

"But if there's anything else..."

"You could quit drinking. You could quit getting your drunk ass into trouble and calling me at all hours. Is this really what you want to do with your time? Are you just going to be a bum writer your whole life?"

Tom's tone is familiar. It's the tone people use when they are about to tell you to fuck off out of their life. It's the tone that ushered me out of several doors; the tone of deadbolts locking.

"I... You're right. I'll quit drinking. But right now I just need to get some hair of the dog to get me right."

"Alright. One beer. And you can drink it while you clean my car."

I go to the kitchen and grab a Lone Star. I chug half of it down. I can already feel the shakes subside.

I look around at the kitchen. There are dishes from three weeks ago. Roaches are fearless here. They know they have the upper hand.

I find the paper towels and search beneath the sink for some cleaner. The roaches eye me with disdain. I don't know why. In my heart I am one of them, eating what scraps I can, sleeping between walls. I've been called vermin before, and I can't entirely disagree. Among their number, I find some all-purpose cleaner.

Back in the living room the DVD menu is still playing. Tom is coding. I ask him where his keys are and he says it's unlocked. "Figured if somebody stole it they'd be doing me a favor," without looking up.

I leave Tom's duplex. Outside is harsh. The sun floods into my widened pupils, causing an awful pain. I squint hard and bear against the Texas heat.

I walk to Tom's car, which has saved me from more scrapes than I can count; certainly more than I can remember.

I open the rear passenger side door and it's a mess in there. The smell of booze and parmesan cheese cooking in a hot car. I need to wipe away all traces of my transgressions. I need to make this right. I drink the rest of my warming beer and set to work.

The splatters on the plastic of the door and the back of the front seat clean easily enough. But the floor is rancid with everclear and something red. Boone's Farm maybe? I didn't have any food in my stomach. That much is clear.

During the forensic investigation of my leavings, I notice a picture under the seat. It's half stained in vomit. It's me and Tom and several other of our friends from high school. I want to mark X's over the faces of all the friends who don't talk to me anymore. Only Tom remains.

I spray and scrub, spray and scrub. I go deep into the carpet, trying to get out the stain and the smell. The carpet won't clean. I spray until I'm out of spray. I scrub until the paper towels are frayed lint.

The beer warms in my belly and unsettles itself. I quickly run to the bushes and let go of the first beer of the day.

"The car will never be clean again," I admit to myself with watery eyes. I throw away the paper towels and the bottle of all-purpose cleaner in the outside bin.

I walk to the street and head in the direction of the bus stop.

Notes of a Dirty Old Moe

By Robert Dean
ig:@LiterallyRobertDean

The payphone at Moe's has been off the hook since Clinton was in office. It used to have a dial tone, a piece of long-dead history: no one's picking up the phone - there's no one to call. Moe stands at the helm, looking at his theater of drunks - the room is sleaze, and this space is their cathedral. He wipes the top of the bar with the same rag he's used since the joint fell into his paws. The threads dangle loose, looking to escape the torture of bleach and beer.

Carl and Lenny spin a quarter, the winner proving no more than who has better quarter spinning skills. They want to beat one another for bragging rights in a lifetime of small victories. Barney's tongue dangles out of his mouth, and a waterfall of drool slides off his teeth. He's been asleep for hours. His snoring rattles the Formica, and no one notices the dull roar.

Homer struggles. Somehow, he caught his "good" work tie in his zipper - It's blue with little pink donuts printed all over. Pulling at the zipper, he's winded and attempts to take a sip of Duff to refresh the palate. As he gives it one last pull downward, the tie comes loose, Homer is on the floor, and so is his beer.

Clips of a Drederick Tatum fight flash across the television screen above the bar. The boxer's gloves slam into his opponents' faces, leaving their jaws looking like a semi-truck smashed into their teeth. Moe sighs. Closing time isn't for hours. He'd been fantasizing about killing himself all day. But he can't. It's not Christmas, and considering trying on any other day would break his tradition of failures.

"Homer, you ever wonder why a dog's paws smell like corn chips?" Lenny asks before pulling a long drink. Homer pauses. He loves corn chips, and this information is blowing his mind.

"I have not heard of such a thing. Please tell me more." Homer replies in his best, interested, intelligent guy voice. Homer daydreams about Santa's Little Helper with massive Frito paws.

"Mmmmmm chip paws."

"They smell like chips once they walk on em enough. Gotta lose the puppy softness," Carl interjects.

"Excuse me, Gentlemen," Homer states as he pushes the barstool away with his ass. "I have an appointment with my dog."

He takes the last swallow from his mug and walks toward the door when it opens. A sketchy figure obscures the light. The man's face is full of scars with a shaggy beard and long, stringy hair. He's wearing broken-down loafers and pants that have seen better days. His button-up shirt is stained around the collar. He looks like he'd been sleeping in the garbage.

"Aye, unless you've got money for a long blackout, get los -" Moe stops cold and reverses his track as his eyes fall on the familiar face.

"Chuckie?!" Moe eeks out.

"One in the same, baby," the figure booms. Moe embraces the stranger.

"I just hitchhiked here. Felt like seeing what you've been doing, how you've been livin'."

"It's been more than twenty years since I seen ya's! I can't believe you're in my bar. After all these years. Fellas, this is my brother, Charles, I mean - Chuckie!" The drunks lift their beers and mumble a hello through the din. Moe embraces his brother, recoiling quickly after feeling the puddle of sweat on his back. "You ain't trying to get money off me, are ya? Cuz I ain't got none."

"No, I'm not here for money. Maybe a drink or two."

"Wow, Moe - we never knew you had a brother," Carl remarks. Barney is slowly coming alive. His eyes open one, by one, like focusing cameras.

"Chuckie here's a writer. Took off when I was in high school. Said he'd rather eat out of the litter box than hang around this dump of a town. Never in one place at the same time for too long. Been livin' around the country. How them books comin' along?" Moe pushes a beer in front of his brother and continues, "If I had enough time to prep, I'd be able to lie and said I read em' all, but I ain't much of a bookworm."

Chuckie lays his palms on the bar, not looking up but talking to the cracks and chips in the bar top. Chuckie hadn't been in town in years and wasn't one to drop a phone call out of the blue, but maybe a letter or two now and again.

"Oh, I been everywhere. New Orleans, San Fran for a spell. Dallas, Austin, Chicago, and Vancouver. I got married in Cleveland. I got married in Paris. But now I'm home in Springfield. I was sitting by a hobo fire after drinking a Fudd when it dawned on me: I forgot my brother's face. I grabbed my suitcase, a bottle of Thunderbird and hit the bricks. I needed a piece of Americana."

"Wow. A real-life writer. You write anything I've heard of?" Lenny asks.

"Nah. Unless you read down and out poetry or novels about drunks!" Chuckie shouts.

And through the day and into the night, they listened to Chuckie's stories of peyote in the desert, strumming broken guitars on street corners in the Haight. Chuckie took the shots and beers pushed in front of him. And for their generosity, the words of dead men fell off his lips as he quoted the greats. Chuckie slid off his stool, pretending to be a boxer looking into his opponent's eyes. Drederick Tatum be damned. As bar tabs rose, he never spent a cent. Chuckie kept everyone going with a piece of poetry. With a loud voice, he recited:

"There's a place for all of you, but you'll never get there. It's too far out, too wide, too big but too familiar. We sign our names daily in the book of gods to get there, but we're still thumbing our way. There's a place for us, all right. The directions are lost, and the map is crumpled. But we're still lost."

The bar of a few clapped.

"I have no idea what it means," Homer said out of the side of his mouth.

"Me neither, but I'm sure a brainiac would be tippin' his cap or somethin'," Moe replied. Lenny wiped away a single tear. Chuckie raved about Baudelaire, William Blake. He told them about reading in Central Park, sleeping on the benches in New Orleans, drinking vodka on the beaches of Hawaii, a trip he didn't pay for. Homer tried to explain his love of Golden Books - Tootle and The Little Pokey Puppy.

The following morning, Homer sat at the kitchen table with his glasses on, flipping through a copy of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. Next to him was a notepad, and the word "thoughts" underlined. Nothing was written down.

"Whatcha readin' Homie?" Marge asks, rubbing her eyes from sleep.

"Oh, this old thing?" Homer inflects, "just looking for inspiration for my lifelong dream of becoming a novelist." He licks his index finger and turns the page.

"Your lifelong dream was fighting a kangaroo. You did that! Six months ago. You were in the paper." Marge pulls out a framed photo of Homer engaged in fisticuffs with a muscular kangaroo; each one has a glove in one another's face with a headline reading, Local Idiot Fights Aussie Knockout Artist.

Rubbing the sleep out of her eyes, Lisa is also up early.

Pouring a cup of coffee, she notices her father reading, too.

"Ohhh, Gregor Samsa; the trials and tribulations of an expectant family. I didn't know you liked Kafka, dad." Lisa remarks before sipping her coffee with two hands.

"Kafka is a literary hero of mine. I appreciate his candor and wit."

Homer scribbles candor and wit on his yellow notepad.

"Literary hero? Just last week, you said books made your eyes sad. You told me you would rather watch a Nic Cage marathon than ever read a book. You were reading a picture book. A book about a happy toy boat."

"I stand by my opinion that Nicolas Cage is awful. But I like writing and reading now. I'm trying to write my novel before the McBane marathon tonight." Moving to his next thought, Homer writes down: Misunderstood father harassed by know-it-all daughter. Father gets revenge with a sword. Lisa storms off, grumbling under her breath.

At Moe's, Dave Brubeck's Take Five emits throughout the bar. Lenny is reading Ginsberg. The usually empty booths are filled with new faces Homer has never seen before. Laptops sit open while some folks read with glasses of wine in front of them. The bar smells different, not like cleaning supplies and spilled whiskey. Homer carries a new briefcase. He's wearing a

turtleneck and circular glasses. Setting his briefcase on the bar, he thumbs the lock and pops it open. Inside is the notepad and one pen. Moe doesn't notice him waiting for a drink; he's too caught up in a copy of Bukowski's Women. Finally looking over, Moe moves to pour Homer a Duff.

"Hey Homer."

"Lotta new faces in here today."

"I dusted off that fancy coffee machine I bought back in the 90's when everyone was watchin' Friends. Past me was thinking ahead to future me."

Moe pulled the espresso machine out from a cabinet and pulled out an entire rodent graveyard from years of neglect.

"Soon as I fired this baby up and stuck a handwritten sign up out in front, a buncha smart guys with beards and college kids showed up."

The clocks' hands drift across the face, and hours pass. Lenny is in tears as Howl moves him. Carl has a MacBook Pro open, typing away furiously. He's wearing a beret. Barney sits at the other end of the bar, casually putting down thoughts on bar napkins in between downing mugs of beer.

Around nine PM, Chuckie makes an appearance. Since dropping into Springfield, he hasn't changed his clothes; no one's said anything, assuming it's all a part of his "process." Within a few moments, a group of artsy kids come up, asking him to sign their books and take photos.

"Shot and a beer is the price of admission." The kids buy him enough rounds to last until tomorrow. Chuckie signs a kid's arm, who swears he's getting it tattooed. Chuckie notices a cute girl in the group, who couldn't be any older than 21 - within minutes, she's giving him her number and a cigarette. Chuckie swings around back toward Moe, smiling and then lighting the smoke.

"Fans."

"Looks like you're doing ok for yourself. Folks seem to know ya." Moe remarks as he pours the first shot.

"I'm niche, man. I'm the guy dudes read when they're figured out how whiskey tastes and how love is cruel. I've never written a bestseller, just stuff that sells enough to buy me a beer and pay rent on a one-bedroom apartment. I don't even have a stove - I have a hot plate. But, hey - I got books printed in Spain."

Homer scribbles poetry down on the yellow notepad. It reads:

Beer makes my heart happy.

Marge makes me tingle.

Flanders sucks.

Chester Lampwick, the local bum, walks in, and before Moe can holler at him, he and Chuckie embrace.

"Met Chester on the train into town. Told him if he got a wild hair to check this joint if he needs a sip." Chester pulls up a stool next to Chuckie, licking his chops at the prospect of a beer.

"His beers are comin' outta your fund."

The bar gets hazy as Homer, Carl, and the crew read their work aloud. It's terrible. Chuckie feels good that he's still the best in the room. Barney disappeared about an hour ago. His drink has a collection of condensation beaded on the sides of the mug, signaling the escape of moisture. On his way to the bathroom, Chuckie noticed the group of Barney's poetry napkins- the writing was clear, concise, and crushing. Everything he'd worked for was worthless. Chuckie knew he was a hack after flipping through the dozens of bar thoughts laced with profound thoughts, free-verse poems, and words strung together that showcase the vexing colors of humanity. Every ounce of sadness he sought out through the years, the torment of life coupled

with the panicking beauty juxtaposed, was here in miniature portraits.

Chuckie was pale. He looked at the pile of brilliance and hated life. This confabulation of bodies went about their business, having no idea a master was somewhere in this wretched building, and he wasn't Chuckie.

He'd forgotten why he got up in the first place, and then an intense wave of kidneys needing relief barreled through his body.

As Chuckie walked into the commode, he heard a minor symphony of deep snoring. Being no stranger to a bathroom nap, who was he to judge? Relieving himself, Chuckie zipped up and walked to the sink and splashed water on his face - needing the moment to collect what he felt inside.

Through the rumbles of snores, Barney mumbled. Chuckie walked back toward the stall and footed the door open. Barney was on the toilet, fully dressed, using a roll of toilet paper for a pillow as he leaned against the stall wall. He watched Barney slumber, wondering what brilliant thoughts lie beyond the borders of practical reality - what this slipshod, solipsistic Savant saw in the world? Barney let a massive burp rip, even deep in his sleep.

While Barney's chest rose and fell in a Duff-laced coma, Chuckie traipsed out of the bathroom. Walking past Barney's napkins, he slipped them into his pocket, cool as a fan. He sat down, finished his drinks, and played the night off like a madman with Chester. He never achieved a drunk no matter how much booze he threw down his gullet. The power of the words was too much. As a man with a fire in his pocket, Chuckie felt Barney's words signing their name into his flesh, as they had his heart.

When it was closing time, Chuckie embraced his brother.

"Moe, I hate to cut and run -I'm gonna hide out for a while. I got a new book idea. I gotta get writing. It's been fun, huh."

Despite Moe's usual hangdog look, there was an extra layer of sadness to his already dreadful demeanor.

"Ya just got here."

"Sorry, I can't stay in one place too long. It spooks me."

"Yea, Chuck. Good seein' ya's." And like that, Chuckie was out the door. Homer put down his copy of William Blake and looked around. "I need to kill these brain cells from trying to understand why a dumb tiger is so important." Homer tossed the book in the trash.

A year later, Barney stands at the urinal. Tacked above is a newspaper clipping for all to see—Chuckie on the front page of the Arts Section. The photo is of him sitting in a dark bar, surrounded by empty bottles and an overflowing ashtray. Chuckie's new book *Barroom Menagerie* is winning a swath of awards. He's the literary world's darling outsider. The words "genius" and "brilliant" are thrown around. Chuckie's even been invited to read down in Australia. Chuckie talks about his life, struggle, and what life's like to live in the gutter. He explains his battle gave birth to such tragic, beautiful work. The paper offers a snippet of the work: "The days dance like nimble-footed ballerinas on the edge of knife blades, only to watch time slip away" - somewhere in his subconscious, Barney recites the words. They come to him. "If only I knew the names of everyone I've ever loved, if only for a moment." A tiny light flickers in Barney's head, a sense of familiar betrayal, but then it's forgotten: someone dropped a dollar in the urinal, and that's almost half the cost of a beer.

WARNING: Smoking
 May Result in Fetal
 Death, And Low Birth Weight.

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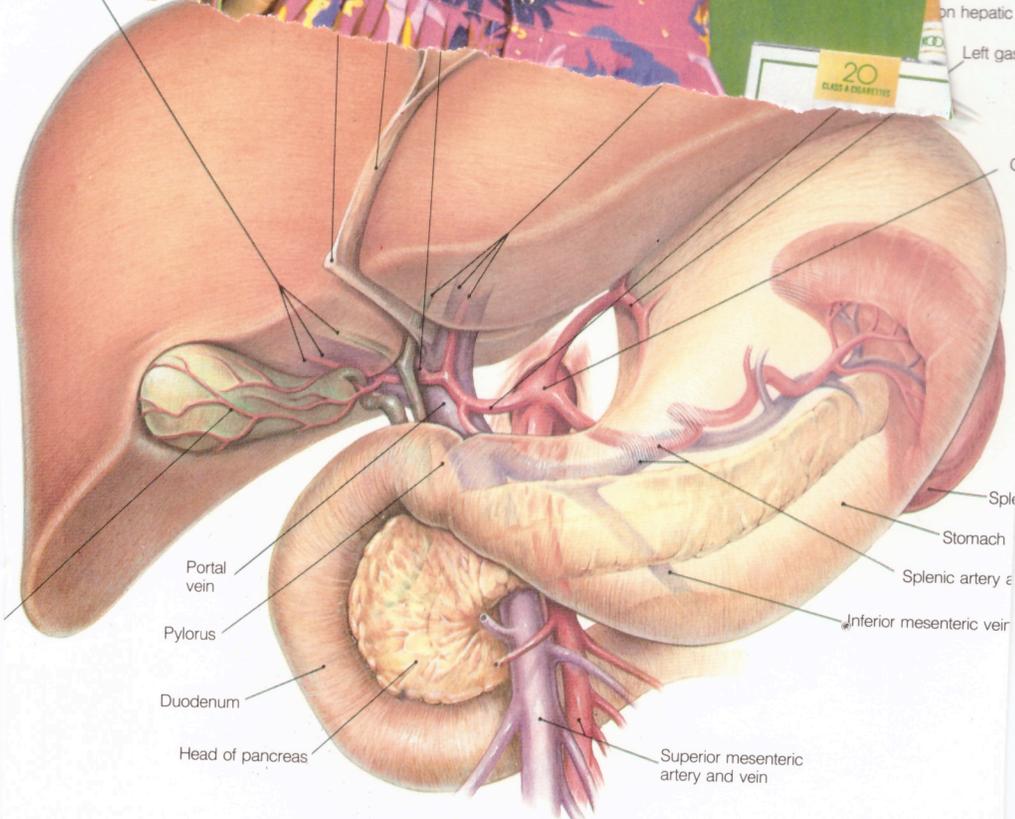
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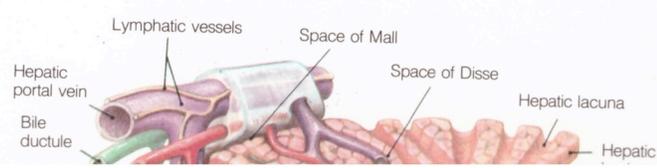


LIVER LOBULE

Right and left
 gastric veins

Splenic vein

Right and left
 gastroepiploic
 veins



Aneurysms

By Nick Gaudio

One late-October night, a girl I knew named Sara stopped by and insisted that we smash pumpkins. Her jerk of a father had died a few weeks before and she wasn't sure how she felt about it. So we drank, then we destroyed every jack-o-lantern we could find along three city blocks outside of Ann Arbor..

Eventually, we got tired, so we sat on a stoop at a random house party. Sara eulogized like she was stoned, discussing humanity's need for "benign violence" – I was racing on adrenaline because I hadn't vandalized anything in years.

We were drinking bad beer. I had the foresight to act like I knew "Um... Matt" when the host asked – my good guess for the evening. A student had handed us two Solo cups, no charge.

"I actually think," Sara said, "the brain can think too much."

I thought about it, not too hard.

"Yes," I said.

Sara asked me for a cigarette – she wasn't a smoker – and we sat for a time there, imagining all we'd ever seen. If that could be too much for either of us. Sara put her hand in mine and said,

"It's like the pumpkins," and I walked her home in a tepid snowfall that she stopped once to admire at the corner of Huron and State.

For the fact of the matter, I don't think Sara and I were ever in love. I tell this story and people ask. The truth is, I never considered we had any connection until maybe right then – when she twirled on a lamppost once, staggered a bit and pointed her chin up to the dark clouds, when I could see her breath hot in the air, when I knew her thoughts – a pretty girl looking up into the sky, wondering if her head would someday explode.

shitshow at the fuck factory

By Marty Shambles
t:@MartyShambles

There are many heroes in this story.

There's the paperboy who saw a man step to a ledge and yelled, "Life's not worth the pain!"

There's the man who had a transcendent experience watching the man jump from the ledge; who knew at that moment that the plummeting man was a messiah of the fall, here to release us from the guilt of our undoing; who in the following days built a shrine to the man upon the spot where he died; who sat cross-legged next to the shrine to inform people of the prophecy and philosophy of the fall.

There's the painter, who was so moved by the words of the Prophet of The Fall that she moved her studio down to the shrine; who psychedelically painted in the shadow of the building that killed her messiah; whose depictions of The Fall would transfix passersby in visual reverie for minutes, sometimes hours – the content of which was endlessly debated, and is debated to this day.

There were the acolytes of the Prophet, who wrote down the Scrolls of The Fall, which opens thusly:

Where once the arc of history bent toward justice, it is now bent along the trajectory of a fall. Cancel all your subscriptions. Hand yourself a pink slip. Now is the time of grace.

There was the literary agent who saw a future in decline and signed the scrolls with Schuster & Simon in the liminal time between Christmas and New Years. At first the book was a flop. Nobody wanted to read about the entropy of their conditions. But it struck a nerve with all who felt a tinge in their belly, telling them that the best has already happened.

There is only one villain in this story. And that's the wife of the man who fell; who after anonymously receiving a copy of the book, came to realize what the book was based upon; who went down to the site of her husband's death and found a carnivalesque atmosphere; who chastised with sharpest tongue the millers-about and hangers-on; who saved the deepest of her ire for the Prophet himself.

The resulting interaction was recorded in the Second Book of Scrolls (abridged).

And lo! She affixed her needle stare upon the Prophet and spoke unto him, "Listen up, you fucking losers! I will sue you all out of existence for using my husband's name for your little shitshow here."

And the Prophet then smiled upon her and said, “It does not matter that it was him. He merely dramatized our natural direction.”

Journey to the Wendy's Darkside: Inside Their 1980s Training Videos

By Robert Dean
ig:@LiterallyRobertDean

I haven't eaten at a Wendy's in years, but I'm stopping for lunch. Will it be a Baconator or Asiago Chicken? Dipping fries into a Frosty; that salty plus sweet combo is the American collective experience next to baseball, jazz, and stand up comedy. After skimming Wendy's website to see if favorites like the Double Stack were still around, I stumbled on the Big Bacon Cheddar Cheeseburger Triple. And holy fuck, this gravedigger

clocks in at 1,420 calories. The photo alone makes me feel fatter. Instead of fresh lettuce and all that shit you see on the commercials, this beast is photographed straight, dipping porn juice with sauces and cheeses. I'm not going to order one. I'd rather not have a conversation with the Grim Reaper in the dining room, but I hope someone near me does.

Wendy's Twitter is the gold standard for fast food shit-talking with such greatest hits as telling Mike's Hard lemonade they're still "the worst tasting yellow liquid." But all this interest in Wendy's doesn't hinge on me rekindling a love for the joint with the one-time salad bar where you could have pasta or build your own tacos. I spend hours watching cooking shows. Bon Appetite and Food & Wine sit on my floor. I own knives from Japan. Everything changed when Shambles got me hip to the vintage training video.

Enter edible insanity

Dave Thomas, the founder of Wendy's built an empire on not being the Clown or the King. This guy managed to sell salads, square burgers, bowls of chili, and baked potatoes, against Big Macs and Whoppers and still does decades after his death. But whoever guided Thomas got the old man to invest in the wackiest training videos you'll ever see.

In "Chili Can be Served with Cheese," a soulful funk band slaps and pops through an explanation of how much chili goes in a large or small bowl and how to put cheese on top. The singer croons, "Chili comes in large and small," pointing out the difference in bowl type for in-house or to-go. Staff must "make sure to stir it right," offering detailed instructions to ensure

you don't take the stuff off the top but the chili fermenting on the bottom. And it's not like this is some corny band; these guys are pros in the vein of a Great Value Arthur Baker or Guy. The singer dives into Frosty sizes and how to place them on the tray while keeping tight shots of hands diligently working. This is pure funk madness with the singer howling, "Chili, Frosty, milk and cookies, what a great snack. Have yourself some simple fun cuz you got the knack!" We fade out with a smiling Wendy's worker doling out expert bowls of chili right up to the fill line. She has "the knack."

"Cold Drinks," is a 90s banger torn from the Paula Abdul "Straight Up" playbook. A perfectly coiffed drink slinger shakes and shimmies ready to deal. My biggest beef though, is the lyrical content: "soft drinks, lemonade, water, cold tea, it's up to you, it's up to me." It's not up to her, though, is it? It's my order. I want messaging consistency. Our blonde beauty leans over the counter, pointing out cup different sizes, letting us know to "keep it straight" while the beat pulses behind. We get in the weeds here. Apparently, there's more finesse with pouring technique. There's even instructions on where the drink should go for proper tray weight management if you decide to stick around for your burger and fries. There's an awkward phrasing of "hand your drink to the coordinator and tell that guest you'll see them later!" she says with a big smile, tucked in polo and a hearty wave. These are not the sins Jesus died for.

The flip side to the "Cold Drinks" coin is "Hot Drinks," This one slaps. Whoever was sitting in the production chair was like, "alright, broskis, we need Michael Jackson vibes," and the band knocked out a jam three or four notes away from "Smooth Criminal" except, talking about pouring hot coffee for a fast-

food chain. We're talking consecutive handclaps and a signature "woooooo" to kick off the track with a photo of goddamn Sanka. (If you don't know what Sanka is, ask your parents. Our grandparents drank it.) This Wendy's madman puts on a show. He's a performer. Our milquetoast white girl hit us with ice knowledge, this guy shot his scenes in a dark room, complete with steaming cups of coffee and fuck me lighting. We're delivered, "At Wendy's we always serve it right away, so have a good day." This shit is so wholesome.

A double rave for a double Dave

We arrive at the piece de resistance, the greatest mindfuck in fast food training videos: Grill Skill. We start with the old school Thomas, offering, "When I started Wendy's, I wanted the best hambouyger in da bidness, a Wendy's Old Fayshuned Hambouyger." The accent is endearing. It gives the watcher a feeling of homespun confidence. Dave's part ends, and this is when the video goes off the rails. It starts with a series of b-roll cuts of the typical fast-food scenes: lettuce shredding, clocking in, and putting the coffee on. (The technique would make the Hot Drinks guy stoked.) Our main character, Bill puts his apron on, and his super WASPy boss, Mary, tells him he's gonna learn to work the burgers. Mary does have a stunning neckerchief, so she demands respect. But, as the VHS is loaded into the machine, which looks straight from the Challenger's control room, the acid kicks in. A floating head appears, summoning Bill to the laser show world of how to work a Wendy's Burger grill, complete with a guy who's got a golden motherfucking spatula. There's smoke. The "Grill Skill" master has on sequins. Bill is sucked into the TV. Now he's in Wendy's World, where the Grill Skill master does not speak in standard

sentences. He raps everything. The master solicits the proper technique for Wendy's burger - how to lay the meat on the grill - grain up, when to salt - top-down, and when to flip. He acknowledges the "red juice" but not that it's blood rising out of the cooking patty. If you over or undercook your burger, it goes in the chili meat bin. But, NEVER toss in a patty with cheese, though. It'll ruin the classic Wendys chili `flavor.``

The Grill Skill master works his golden spatula like a wizard. He stops as the music breaks into a random guitar solo and uses his burger flipper to solo along with the groove. When it's Bill's turn to flip the meat, the Grill Skill master raps everything back to Bill. Who needs standard language practices when you're in Wendy's World? Bill, for his part, takes a cue and begins to rap back at the master - in his accent. (Bill is white, the Grill Master is black.) We've grown accustomed to the rapping grill guy, but what happens? The beef patties start singing. They have cartoon faces. And they're women, and they're wearing 1980s makeup, yodeling about how delicious they are.

There's no innuendo. Everything is literal. This is a training video, and every lyric comes back to cleanliness or proper food preparation. There's never an allusion to anything unwholesome. Bill comes back from his psychedelic experience as neckerchief lady and goes full-on grill master, impressing the shit out of her and her fantastic helmet hair. We shoot back to Dave, who's got an enormous tray of food - chili, frosty, burger, fries, drink, and extra burger - famished from all of this ass-wiggling funkiness.

A random flame hits the screen. More people are playing spatulas as guitars. I don't know if this was a "whoever can shoot the

best video wins a prize" or what, but it looks like a local Wendy's, called "The Crew," and they're going off. For the next FOUR MINUTES, various characters cook meat, dance with their tools, mug at the camera for the lines "I got just what you need." Some pump their arms to show off the guns. Then this old man pops in who looks straight out of Poltergeist II, which then moves into a purple sparkly mouth singing about their "grill skills." Instead of the bedazzled rapper from another dimension, these kids from the 1980s who all likely voted for Trump in the last election seduce us with greasy patties and melted American cheese.

The Wendy's rabbit hole only gets weirder the more you watch it. There are always new details, mini-plots lost within the training world lexicon. If you're looking to drop some mescaline, hit the peyote, or wander into the darkest realm of the human psyche, let the girl with the red pigtails be your guide because there is no god where she reigns, for she is the master of the Grill Skills. We must repay her with a cup of chili and a Jr. Bacon Cheeseburger.

PREGNANCY AND BIRTH



2. In the first stage of labor the uterus undergoes irregular contractions of varying intensity. The amniotic sac (bag of waters) may or may not rupture at some point during these contractions.



4. Presentation of the head. An episiotomy (surgical incision) may be needed.

