

Gracies Dinnertime Theatre

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Foreword

By Dan Conley

I consider finding out about *Gracies Dinnertime Theatre* during the first week of my first year here at RIT one of the most fortunate things ever to happen to me. There's just something about wandering through Riverknoll looking for a stranger's apartment that sets the tone for life on campus.

I wasn't entirely sure what I had gotten myself into until I began browsing through the archives on our website and stumbled across the holy tome of knowledge which our forefathers have dubbed *The Big Red Book*. Here I found all sorts of articles, but most importantly the section entitled RIT. Apparently there are all sorts of things that my FYE class failed to cover in that class about campus history.

What do you mean the CIA used to be on campus?

The Politics of High Tech Damnation

by A. S. Zaidi. Vol. 10, Iss. 3.

"RIT should stand for 'really in touch' with the real world," said Carl Kohrt, executive vice president of Kodak, in his keynote address during the Nov. 14, 1996 installation of the cornerstone for the 157,000 square foot Center for Integrated Manufacturing Studies (CIMS). The building was financed at a cost of \$21 million, \$11.25 million of which was provided by the federal government and \$9.25 million by the state of New York.

The Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) has also earned the appreciation of the Central Intelligence Agency, which has designated the institution as a "strategic national resource worthy of explicit development and support." In a 1985 Memorandum of Agreement between RIT and the CIA, the school agreed that its curriculum would be "responsive to certain defined specialties of the CIA."

RIT's responsiveness to those specialties may well explain its recent attempt to cut art programs and the ensuing student unrest there. In late April '96, four weeks before the end of the final academic quarter, RIT professors leaked word to students that several art programs, including painting, printmaking, glass, textiles, ceramics, art education, medical illustration and

Without GDT I would have been - and would still be - ignorant to these rather juicy bits of information which I believe are very important; ya know, that whole "doomed to repeat history" thing and all. Once I was handed the position as editor I decided that we needed to call attention to these articles again. So, I hath decreed that the first issue after the holiday break will reprint something from the *BRB* to keep history fresh in everyone's minds.

To kick things off we've selected what I consider to be the most all-encompassing article, *The Politics of High Tech Damnation*. Kick back, pour yourself a nice drink and enjoy.

interior design, were about to be discontinued or placed on "probationary continuation."

The cuts would have devastated RIT's prestigious School of Art and Design (SAD) and the School for American Crafts (SAC) and couple of days after learning about the cuts, students gathered at RIT's Bevier Art Gallery on a Monday to organize. When they heard that the college's trustees were meeting at that very moment on campus in Building 1, they moved to its lobby to get their attention.

Soon President Simone and Provost Stanley McKenzie came down from the trustee meeting to hear the concerns of the students. Simone might have calmed the students, right there and then, with some vague words of reassurance. Instead, one of his gaffes, caught on videotape by a film student, propelled the students into action.

When a student asked Simone where the art schools fit into his vision of RIT's future, Simone replied that while RIT was primarily known for its engineering and computer science, there was a danger that graduates could be too "narrowly focused."

What the schools of American crafts, photography, interior and graphic design did for engineers, said Simone, was to provide them with "breadth of experience." "As they walk on campus they see, uh... somebody... there are not too many engineers with, uh...

long hair, for example,” he said, pointing to Kurt Perschke, a grad student in ceramics.

There was a moment of stupefied silence. Kelly Gunter, a writer for GDT at the time, described what followed:

I think I heard a cricket at this point. The silence in the room was actually tangible as everyone had to stop and take a mental step back. I know that I was whispering inside my skull, “Please, dear Lord, let this be a metaphor for something. Please don’t let him mean what I know he’s saying.” Of course, he had to keep talking. I, and everyone else in the room who had been repeating that silent plea, could no longer block it out: he was indeed saying what we thought he was saying. In the wake of that aftershock, the room’s ambient animosity level grew ten fold and threatened to precipitate out of solution. Simone eventually realized his folly and made a feeble attempt to save his floundering position by saying, “Well, I guess there are a lot of people here with short hair.” All was lost.

The next day, students rallied in a breezeway, packed tightly together. A new activist group, Save Our School (SOS), had been born of panic and anger.

“The art programs are world-renowned,” said engineering student Jesse Lenney to the crowd. “Who runs this place? Who are they trying to please by booting the art students?”

Later, at a RIT community meeting, students expressed their concerns to Margaret Lucas, then dean of the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences (CIAS). On Thursday, students formed committees for speakers, alumni and parent contacts, rally organizers, research, as well as media and community outreach.

At a mass rally at Webb Auditorium attended by hundreds, students viewed the videotape in which Simone made his infamous hair remark. “That’s what we’re here for, to run around so the engineering students can have some diversity,” said Kurt Perschke, unappeased by Simone’s apology to him a couple of days earlier. “I want an apology for cutting my school. I don’t give a damn about my hair.”

That day, the faculty voted unanimously to support the efforts of the SOS students to save the art programs. Professors who had previously limited themselves to slipping information under the door of the

new SOS office at night, now openly criticized the process that had led to the cuts.

As information came to light, it was made clear that RIT professors had been given an “Academic Program Review Criteria” form to numerically evaluate their programs according to their centrality, financial viability, marketability and quality. Administrators were to recommend programs for consolidation or discontinuance based on the raw data provided.

The professors did not appear to have understood the purpose of the evaluative “tools,” which were meant to give the appearance of “scientific objectivity” to corporate downsizing. Not surprisingly, the programs that won out in the evaluative process were those dear to the corporate interests on the RIT trustee board, including accounting, business administration, management, finance, information systems and marketing.

In a memo to RIT administrators, written during the first week of student protests, Thomas Lightfoot, an associate professor in CIAS, said:

“Numerous proposals have been put forth... which have not been seriously considered or even responded to. Is the faculty the driver of the curriculum or the administration? Is the faculty even a partner in the process? Or are we just employees, to do what were told, as the President has suggested?... I must add that the faculty, of at least the SAD/SAC component of the college, also pointed out its judgment that the review instrument was seriously flawed... It is also notable that the reasons for discontinuance keep changing. The President wanted to identify a pot of money that could be saved through this process. He was convinced that there was lot of waste and money being lost by our programs. When it was discovered that there was no money to be found, the reasons shifted to a resource reallocation rationale.”

That week, SOS obtained donations from parents, student groups and alumni. They passed out flyers to students and asked alumni to write to the trustees, some of whom professed to be unaware of the proposed cuts. They got coverage from local television stations.

The rallies were followed by image-oriented protests. With the permission of Albert Paley, an RIT

artist in residence, SOS students symbolically shrouded his sculptures outside the Strong Museum and the Eastman School of Music. They also wrapped the Main Street Bridge railings that Paley had designed.

At the Memorial Art Gallery, ceramics grad students Molly Hamblin and Kurt Perschke used gauze and string to cover works by Paley and Richard Hirsch, an RIT ceramics professor who attended the event in support of the arts. “We intend to keep the heat on,” said Perschke. “Today’s demonstrations are about showing the fundamental connection between the school and the art community.”

The media images of a Rochester without art succeeded in embarrassing the trustees, and the RIT administration quickly backed away from its intention to cut the arts. In under two weeks, SOS had proved that students, alumni, faculty and even much of the business community strongly supported the arts. Through efficacious aesthetic persuasion, the students had saved their programs, at least for the time being, while alerting the RIT community to the implications of the Strategic Plan.

It was impossible, however, to sustain this activism, which began to wane as finals drew near. “A lot of students have shown how dedicated they are, but their work suffers,” explained glass grad student Luis Crespo. “Come ‘crunch time,’ people will feel torn. In the end it boils down to the fact that they are students and have to get a grade.”

In a series of informational meetings, Simone tried to promote the Strategic Plan, but the authoritarian character of the plan made it a hard sell. In addition to downsizing programs, the plan called for outsourcing RIT’s Physical Plant services. Anthony Burda, an editor of the student weekly, *The Reporter*, was present at one meeting. He described Simone’s response to a woman who had asked him about the outsourcing:

“As an alternative to out-sourcing... we might move towards student help... like fifty percent, something like that....” He points to catering, where the student staff comprises about 90%. He also points to savings in pensions, health insurance, etc., by having student janitors. Not to mention the saving in flat pay, resulting from paying students only around \$5.25 an hour. “By the time they’re ready for a pay increase, they graduate.” He starts laughing before he can

finish his sentence. Everyone laughs. Well, the professors laugh. The lady in the audience, and the janitorial staff of about thirty, sit in the back quietly. For some reason, it appears they really don’t find getting replaced by student workers too funny.

At another meeting, an undergraduate asked Simone what role students played in the decision-making process at RIT. Christopher Hewitt, writing for *The Reporter*, provided an example of Simone’s sensitivity to students:

He responded by telling the student that “in my opinion, the 18–22 year–old age group is not qualified in making decisions. You’re a customer...and if you don’t like it, you can vote with your feet.” When asked about Simone’s comment, the student replied, “We can vote with our feet by stamping them down in protest. Why should we run away from a place that we belong to when we can stay and make it a place that others will come to, not run away from? I think that these old men who are making the decisions don’t realize how qualified the 18–22 age group is in making change and solid, competent decisions.”

Thus did Simone squander the trust and goodwill that had come to him as RIT’s new president soon after the CIA controversy of 1991.

Cut to 1991. The collapse of the Soviet Union had threatened this country with a peace dividend, but now the US was avoiding that danger as it edged towards Bush’s reelection campaign and the Gulf War.

In this climate, Richard Rose, then president of RIT and a former Marine, announced that he was taking a four month sabbatical to work on national policy and procedures in Washington. It occurred to someone to try to reach Rose at the CIA. When Rose answered the phone, the RIT–CIA scandal had begun.

Though most documents pertaining to CIA activities at RIT were shredded, a few were leaked to the press after a highly publicized theft from Rose’s office. Many professors and administrators recalled their experiences with the CIA when the press and a fact-finding commission began to investigate the affair.

The “lead organization” in the CIA–RIT relationship, according to the 1985 Memorandum of

Agreement, was the Center for Imaging Science. New courses were to be added in artificial intelligence, integrated electro optics and digital image processing. Rochester journalist JB Spula explained why the CIA helped build RIT's imaging science facilities: RIT offers the CIA, and the national security establishment in general, state-of-the-art support in things like aerial photography, image-analysis, and high-tech printing. These and related technologies are the building blocks of surveillance, spy satellites, and, at the end of the militarist's rainbow, "Star Wars" in all its imperial glory.

In 1985, Rose consulted with CIA agents over the choice of a new director for the imaging science center. One agent, Robert Kohler, became an RIT trustee in 1988. Another, Keith Hazard, later joined RIT's advisory board for imaging science.

In 1989, the administration tried to remove the center from the College of Graphic Arts and Photography and place it under the RIT Research Corporation (RITRC), which administers most of the CIA training, recruitment and research at RIT.

CIA influence extended to the rest of RIT as well. The Federal Programs Training Center was created at RIT in 1988 to give technological support to the CIA. There, students were paid \$8–10 an hour to produce forged documents. The crafts were also put to CIA use. Woodworking majors designed furniture with secret drawers, and picture frames with cavities for listening devices. In one course, students identified only by their first names, designed wax molds for keyholes. The CIA even tried to place an interpreter at RIT's National Technical Institute for the Deaf.

Andrew Dougherty, Rose's executive assistant and a member of the Association of Former Intelligence Officers, supervised CIA activities at RIT.

He authored the 1985 memorandum and consulting reports for the CIA, two of which caused a stir. The first, "Changemasters," resulted from discussions among six panelists, including Robert McFarlane (of Iran-Contra fame) and former vice presidents of Xerox and AT&T.

"Changemasters" advocated economic espionage against U.S. trading partners, the transfer of government-funded technology to the private sector, and the repeal of antitrust legislation. The second report, "Japan 2000," was an outgrowth of discussions with such experts on Japanese culture as McFarlane, Tim Stone, a former CIA agent and director of corporate intelligence for Motorola, and Frank Pipp, a retired Xerox executive. It warns our nation's decision-makers: "Mainstream Japanese, the vast majority of whom absolutely embrace the national vision, have strange precedents. They are creatures of an ageless, amoral, manipulative and controlling culture—not to be emulated—suited only to this race, in this place." The report concludes, "'Japan 2000' should provide notice that 'the rising sun' is coming—the attack has begun."

When the contents of "Japan 2000" were disclosed, Rose tried to distance himself from them by saying that the report was only a working draft. Although he later released a revised version, the report still caused widespread indignation. RIT historian Richard Lunt observes, "It is the height of hypocrisy to solicit gifts from leading Japanese corporations to finance the imaging science building while at the same time preparing a confidential document for the CIA which claims the Japanese government and Japanese corporations are conspiring to attack and destroy the United States."

The graduation ceremonies in May '91 were

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marked by protests. Visitors to RIT found the outlines of bodies drawn in chalk on sidewalks and parking lots.

That June, the administration announced that a blue ribbon trustee committee would investigate CIA activities at RIT. Somehow, a committee containing the likes of Colby Chandler, then chairman of Kodak, and Kent Damon, a former vice president of Xerox, did little to reassure critics of RIT-CIA ties that its inquiry would be impartial. The administration later added two students, five professors and an alumnus, who happened to be a Kodak vice president, to the committee. It also brought in Monroe Freedman, a former law school dean at Hofstra University, to serve as its senior fact finder.

As the scandal unfolded, Rose and Dougherty hastened to reassure the RIT community that the CIA was not unduly influencing the curriculum or threatening academic freedom. Claiming that "morality is built

into every fiber of my being," Dougherty said that the CIA would never do anything morally objectionable. "They are really gun-shy about doing anything improper with an academic institution," he maintained.

Monroe Freedman, the senior fact finder of the commission that investigated the RIT-CIA ties felt otherwise. In his report he wrote, "Intimidation and fear are recurring themes in comments about matters relating to the CIA at RIT and, specifically, about Mr. Dougherty. One Dean called him "authoritarian," "harsh," and a "threatening individual." Another Dean said that Mr. Dougherty "had the power to make you or break you."

"To clash with him meant that you were going to be fired," the Dean said, giving the name of one person who, he alleged, was fired because he had said that Mr. Dougherty did not understand what a university is. One Vice President expressed resentment that he had

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been compelled to accept the appointment of an unwanted subordinate for an administrative position, noting that the subordinate also had responsibilities at the RITRC. “Things were done, said the same Vice President, and I had to go along.”

Some RIT faculty and administrators declined to cooperate with the intelligence agency. Edward McIrvine, dean of RIT’s College of Graphic Arts and Photography, twice refused CIA security clearance requests. Nonetheless, the CIA conducted a check on McIrvine without his permission and asked to see his medical records when it found that he had seen a psychiatrist a few years earlier.

Malcolm Spaul, head of the Film and Video Department, was asked to train CIA agents in video surveillance. Spaul declined because he is a friend of the family of Charles Horman, the journalist who was kidnapped and murdered in Chile during the 1973 coup. Spaul said that there was “some evidence that the CIA knew he was in captivity and acquiesced in his execution.”

Another professor, John Ciampa, head of RIT’s American Video Institute, refused to work for the CIA by pointing to a clause in his contract that says that the institute would only engage in life enhancing activities.

As the RIT scandal drew attention to CIA involvement at other universities, Dougherty advised his CIA superiors that time was of the essence if the agency’s activities at RIT were to be preserved. “Every day that the Federal Programs Training Center can be identified with RIT compounds our problem.”

Dougherty proposed replacing the RITRC with a non-profit university foundation that would include the University of Rochester. In June, Rose announced that he would sever all personal ties with the CIA, and Dougherty resigned as his assistant. Two months later, in September, Rose announced that he would step down as president the following year.

As a result of the CIA controversy, a committee was created to oversee research contracts at RIT. Recently, however, the committee informed Simone that it was not receiving the information that it needed to do its job. In fall ‘96, RIT trustees unanimously voted to designate President Rose as RIT President Emeritus.

RIT’s current president, Albert Simone, took

office in 1992. At first, the RIT community welcomed Simone’s accessibility and his involvement in university affairs. He was quoted in the October 10, 1994 *Henrietta Post* as saying, “If you’re not an open person, a sensitive person, a person who genuinely likes others, you can’t be an effective decision-maker.”

Compared to his predecessor, Simone appeared forthright and in touch with students and faculty. In an early speech, he expressed his commitment to the liberal arts. “He’s a breath of fresh air,” said philosophy professor Wade Robison.

About six months after his inauguration as president, Simone began to craft a ten year Strategic Plan for RIT, calling it “the most participatory plan in all of academia.” He then embarked the university on a path of managed attrition, and began to make plans to expand partnerships with industry and to revamp the curriculum. Having slashed six million dollars from the annual budget, Simone announced his intention of cutting ten to twenty million dollars more, citing the need for “teamwork” if the RIT community was to benefit from the plan.

“If we have the sense of community I’ve talked about...I believe that we’ll be able to find ways to—if we have to—downsize, restructure, reorient, re-prioritize, reallocate,” Simone said, adding reassuringly, “I think we’re going to have to do all of those things, but that doesn’t mean we have to do them and have a lot of hurt and bloodshed and despair and destruction.”

Had the RIT community been more familiar with Simone’s tenure as president of the University of Hawaii (UH) from 1984 to 1992, it might have been wary of the changes in store for RIT. David Yount, who served as vice president under Simone at UH, says in *Who Runs the University?* that it was widely rumored that Simone had been brought in as a “hit man” and that approximately one-third of the twenty-four deans left office early in his administration.

According to Yount, Simone’s brash personality did not endear him to the UH community: Many of his listeners echoed the sentiments of former Manoa Chancellor Marvin Anderson when he confided privately to his staff that Al Simone has no class. Especially embarrassing were the sexist comments and ethnic slurs that sporadically popped out—his golfing double entendre about the hooker or his careless pronunciation of local names... Although he was coached

for years by female staffers who managed most of the time to put the right words in his mouth and the right thoughts in his head, the wrong words and thoughts continued to emerge. He habitually said “woman” when he meant women, introduced professional couples as “Dr. and Mrs.,” instead of “Dr. and Dr.” and betrayed genuine surprise whenever the career of a married woman surpassed that of her husband.

Several student groups, including Students Against Discrimination and Hawaii Women of Color, held a mock trial of Simone. Their mentor, Haunani-Kay Trask, Professor of Hawaiian Studies, charged Simone with incompetence, racism, sexism and ignorance of Hawaiian history. The jury found him guilty on all counts, and the judge pronounced him “an embarrassment to the entire university community and to the human race.”

The origins of RIT’s crisis in the arts do not lie, however, in the colorful personality of Albert Simone, but in the convergence of the interests of large corporations with those of the national security state. The development of Kodak and Xerox products depends in large part on the advances made in the imaging sciences. Simone, who is both RIT president and chair of the Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce, has built up the well-connected CIMS at the expense of the arts.

Speaking of connections, CIMS was built by the Pike Company, a construction firm which tops the list of a dozen Monroe County companies that last year exceeded the legal limit on corporate campaign contributions. Tom Judson, Pike Company president, claiming to be ignorant of the New York State statute that limits such contributions to \$5,000, said: “Maybe I can get some money back.”

Indeed. No corporation has ever been fined for violating the statute, which was enacted in 1974.

Thus are connections made. The first off campus RIT trustee meeting convened in Washington, DC in April ‘97. President Simone explained, “We want Washington to know us better. We have had a lot of support from the federal government. We need more.”

During their three day stay in Washington, the trustees met with members of Congress and federal officials to discuss such matters as technology transfer and research, and were briefed by a Department of Defense (DOD) undersecretary on U. S. technology

policy. Anita Jones, the director of DOD’s Defense Research and Engineering, observing that she didn’t know of any other university board coming to Washington, said of the RIT trustees visit: “I thought it showed a lot of forward thinking.”

In March ‘97, I interviewed Kurt Perschke and fellow ceramics student and SOS organizer Molly Hamblin. They related to me the history of the School of American Crafts, which owes its existence to Aileen Osborn Webb, founder of the American Craft Council. SAC opened at Dartmouth in 1944 and moved to RIT in 1950. As the first school in this country exclusively devoted to crafts, SAC was inspired by the Crafts Movement, which has been a counterweight to the values of the Industrial Revolution for over a century.

To hear Hamblin describe the material with which she works is to come to feel that it has a life of its own, giving new meaning to Keats’ “strife between damnation and impassioned clay.” Hamblin believes that RIT students are too engrossed in the information highway, too dazzled by the prospect of being able to purchase groceries by computer, to bother to express themselves. She describes to me the eeriness of RIT buildings that are full of people and silent except for the clicking of computer keyboards.

While Perschke and Hamblin are elated that the art schools have earned a reprieve, they know that their existence remains precarious. Hamblin says that the art schools have been given a three to five year “umbrella,” during which they have to successfully market their programs. While advertising has increased student enrollment in the art schools for next year, the RIT administration remains uncommitted to the art programs.

Hamblin notes that positions are being left unfulfilled as professors retire, and that the increased number of art students has not led to an increase in the space available to them or to improvements in their facilities while Perschke laments the absence of institutional memory at RIT, where students know little about the 1991 CIA controversy. Unless the disjunction between past and present is overcome, the arts and crafts may go the way of the dodo and the carrier-pigeon. SAC may be forced to eventually leave RIT and become independent again in order to survive, says Hamblin, who does not relish the idea of being in an institution where she is not wanted.

Drunken Master

By Gary Hoffmann

The sun rose. Or he tried to rise, anyway, but Christ! did he have too much to drink last night. After that final shot of Uncle Al's Discount Kentucky Sour Mash Bourbon the sun couldn't remember a thing. The moon was still in the celestial bathroom doing her level best to violently purge her system of that sweet amber liquid. The sun looked down, bleary eyed, to find mardi gras beads around his neck. The phone rang – Phoebus, and he was pissed. The sun was late for work, again.

“Whiskey, compassion.
Whiskey, companion.
Whiskey, compassion.”

Ben, wake up.
“Wha-?” Wake up. “But the sun isn't even up, yet.” Yeah, it's late today, don't worry about it. “How can the sun be late?” Because it's drunker than you are, now get up. It was true, even the sun was drunker than Ben. He was a failure. He'd tried all his life to be a total lush, and he could never do it. It didn't matter how hard he tried, how much he had to drink, how many bottles of bad rum he consumed in his endless quest to become an alcoholic. He never developed any liver disorders, he never hit his girlfriend or broke down crying in front of his coworkers, he never was unable to remember what happened the night before, and he was never ashamed of what he did remember. He was a failure. The humiliation was agonizing.

Even the mirror laughed at his incompetence. You call yourself an alcoholic? Elliot Ness was a bigger alcoholic than you. Look at you – when was the last time you woke up in a puddle of your own puke? When was the last time you went down on a dirty, lonely trucker for a bottle of cheap whiskey? You can't even drive away your girlfriend. “I'm trying my best.” Well, your best obviously isn't good enough.

“Whiskey, compassion. Whiskey, companion.
Whiskey, compassion.”

“Pour me another.” You sure? That's your third tonight – usually you stop after two. Ben began to weep. “Oh, God! I'm such a horrible alcoholic! I can barely finish two beers in a sitting.” Hey, buddy, it's all right. “No, it's not! You don't understand. My grandfather was an alcoholic. My father was an alcoholic. Even my brother's an alcoholic, but I can't do it. I've been trying for years, but I keep not letting my drinking interfere with my relationships. I can't not hold a steady job. I am so pathetic!” Jeez, I've never seen you like this, man. Tell you what, I'll leave the bottle...on the house. Ben sniffed, his tears dripping off the end of his nose. “Thanks.”

When the sun got home, he found a note from the moon. “It's over. You're a drunk, and I can't deal with this anymore. I wasted the best years of my life with you. There's a hot dog in the fridge. I'm sorry. Goodbye. Love, the moon.” The sun was nearly inconsolable, but there was still a bottle of Mad Dog left. “At least you'll always be here for me.”

“Whiskey, compassion. Whiskey, companion.
Whiskey, compassion.”

“I remember the way Dad used to come home after work, booze on his breath, and start yelling and Mom and me,” Ben said, sighing nostalgic. “Those were good times. Whatever happened to them?” Didn't his liver go into the metabolic equivalent of a codependent relationship with his kidneys? “Yeah. Man, I miss the old guy.” Hey, I'm sure somewhere he's still completely wasted in spirit. Ben sniffed and sat pen-

sively for a moment. “I mean, I can’t even be there like that for my kids. I don’t even have any because I’ve never knocked up some girl while I was plastered.” Damn, that’s bad. You ever thought of going to Alcoholics Anonymous? Maybe they can give you some pointers. “I’ve tried that. My fourth step just always seems so slim by comparison. It’s embarrassing.”

Three days went by and the sun didn’t show up for work. His phone rang every twenty minutes as his boss tried to get hold of him, but that wasn’t enough to wake him from his ethanol-induced catatonia. Saturn knocked on his door the second day. “Go away.” Everyone’s worried about you. “I said go away.” Are you all right? “Go the hell away!” A thud resounded from the door as some airborne object suddenly had its momentum changed. Come on, man. I’m your friend. I can help. The sun didn’t answer. At the end of the third day Vega and Andromeda, two of his old LXA brothers, kicked down his door to find him lying on the floor, barely conscious, surrounded by empty bottles of gin, Nyquil, and mouthwash. “Jesus...” they muttered to themselves as they went to pick him up.

“Whiskey, compassion. Whiskey, companion. Whiskey, compassion.”

“In college I joined a frat, but even that wasn’t enough. I could never quite get the hang of binge drinking on a regular basis. Sure, I could do it every once in a while, but some of those guys were machines. I turned to literature. I studied all the greats – Hemingway, Steinbeck, Faulkner, Fitzgerald. I read about the lives of Jackie Gleason and Ted Kennedy. Churchill was my idol for a time. I figured if I studied them long enough, spent enough time imitating them and trying to understand them, it would just come to me, like a revelation. Suddenly I’d get it, and I’d know what I’ve been doing wrong all these years, and how to do it right. I just kept waiting for an epiphany that never came. Are you familiar with the Jesus Prayer? It’s this short prayer that you repeat over and over as you’re walking, working, whatever. The idea is that if you keep doing this for a long time the prayer will eventually move from your lips to your heart, so even if your lips aren’t moving, you’re still saying the prayer all the time. It becomes a part of you, and you gain true understanding of God. I tried the same thing. I guess I was trying to attain the Booze-Consciousness.

I’d say, ‘Beer, Mercy,’ or ‘Whiskey, Compassion,’ over and over. Even that didn’t work. Four years I wandered, reciting this mantra, and I’m still not an alcoholic.”

The sun rose, pale, low in the sky. A winter sun, sickly looking, but returning to health as the year progressed and spring approached. He had a melancholy look on his face, the kind of face you see on someone who has been forced to confront terrible demons and angry ghosts. The wind was cold and the ground still frozen with snow as he walked towards the door in front of him. He paused briefly on the stone walk, looking around at the tranquility. He sighed, his breath coalescing, freezing, and then dissipating. He knocked on the door and waited agonizingly long moments until she answered. “The moon.” The sun. My god, how long has it been? “Ten years.” You look good. It was a lie. “Thank you.” He knew it was a lie. Come inside.

“Whiskey, compassion. Whiskey, companion. Whiskey, compassion.”

“It took me eight years to find it, but I did.” Ben warmed his hands by the tiny fire. Gnarled hands, hands covered in filth and grime. His clothes reeked of vomit and urine. His nose was red and his eyes bleary with the constant haze of inebriation. He swallowed another swig of the half-finished bottle of vodka he’d found. “For a while I began to think it really was just a myth – the First Bottle, a wine made by Dionysius himself, the wine used later at the Last Supper, preserved by the Templars and passed down through the generations. And I found it, the mythical liquor that would finally turn me into an alcoholic.” He smiled, swaying drunkenly as he stood, as he did so often nowadays. “It only took one sip, and it was the sweetest wine I ever tasted.” He upturned the vodka over his mouth, and then fell to the ground, alone and unconscious.

“Whiskey, compassion. Whiskey, companion. Whiskey, compassion.”

All Eyes On Me

By Eric Belsford

I can't stand being looked at. It feels as if people are constantly looking at me. Don't get me wrong, I don't feel as if I am exceptionally good-looking or anything, I just always feel that there is something wrong with me that is attracting attention. The way I walk, my expression, the possibility of my fly being down, my shoes being the wrong color, my fingernails being too long, the list goes on. I'm just paranoid, I know, that's all. But knowing this doesn't prevent the creeping suspicion that everyone in a room is (gazinggawkingstar-ing) at me.

Even tonight, when I should surely be concentrating on more important things, I feel the eyes boiling my skin from all corners of the room. Well, make that my shirt. Also, add to my big list (right between "my hair's messed up" and "there's something in my teeth") having someone's eyeballs strewn across my shirt.

Okay, so I can't blame anyone for looking. It's a long story, but I have an absolutely appetizing mix of red, yellow, white, and yes, a little green, gooey snotlike stuff on my shirt. It's mostly red. I had no idea there were so many colors in our eyes. I had no idea there was so much in our eyes. I haven't had a chance to look for her pupils yet, as I'm too much in shock. Even if I wasn't, the people in the waiting room, their eyes would keep me still.

So I met this girl. This is not a particularly easy thing for me (sweatingboredomterror), as I like to think of myself as somewhat of an acquired taste. Like almonds. Or something.

My dog used to like to sleep outside of my bedroom door. I thought it was cute; he was protecting me. He was a beautiful dog, a great dane, lab mix. Massive (heavingtramlingslobbering) dog, but I loved him a great deal. I knew that he would never stare at me like everyone else. He loved to jump on my lap while I watched movies on my couch. He was so heavy, and it hurt, but I still enjoyed it. He liked me. I

couldn't really say that about anyone else.

So I woke up one morning and took my shower. Then I walked out of my bedroom to my kitchen to get some orange juice. Well, I tried to walk out of my bedroom. The door would not budge. My dog never, never slept later than me, but I knew he must be what was holding my door shut.

I pushed some more. Hard. The door wasn't going anywhere and by now I was pretty sure I had a dead dog lying in front of it. I didn't know what to do. I had no friends, really, especially none whom I could approach with such a situation. "Hey (meaninglessacquaintance, guyIhardlyknow), could you move my huge dead dog from my bedroom door? Thanks."

Yeah. I was stuck. So I did the only thing I thought I could do: I stepped out onto the fire escape and hoped my dog wouldn't rot too much in the meantime.

The three stories down were awful. Everyone was staring at me, hundreds of people despite being in an empty back alley. I suppose I should've been thinking about my dog, the one who loved me and protected me, but the truth is, I just didn't care. I was (heartlessdetached) numb. So instead I was focused on how vulnerable and exposed I was, clinging to the brick twenty-some feet high and falling.

I met the girl on my lunch break later that day. I won't mention her name for fear of making her disappear. I don't know what made me talk to her, sitting in that sub shop over lunch. I guess she just looked interesting, like she might understand me. So I walked to her table and sat with her. I wasn't as self-conscious as I tend to be, my focus was on her. I said "Hi. I can't talk to people."

"Everyone's always staring at me," I said.

"I have a hard time caring about anything else," I said, and she smiled. She didn't have to say anything, and that seemed right.

I was eerily comfortable with her from the beginning, and I still don't know why. We talked for a few hours after lunch, both of us skipping work. Then I went to her apartment. I couldn't stand to be away from her now that I had found her. I couldn't possibly spend that night or any other without her.

I had never felt so free. I know it sounds horribly cliché, but I really hadn't; not for as long as I could remember had I been truly free. I didn't feel like everyone was staring at me anymore. It just didn't matter. Suddenly I was caring, caring about something other than being looked at. Suddenly my life didn't feel so meaningless.

For months we were together and terrifyingly happy. She seemed to like me an awful lot, I mean, she put up with me okay. I don't know why. I loved her. I really loved her, but I couldn't tell you why. I could never put into words this (needingachingyearning) feeling, and if I tried, I'm afraid it might disappear.

So one night we went out to eat, and I had decided beforehand to tell her how much she meant to me,

how I was incapable of being without her. It really sounds like bullshit, I know. But this is how I felt. I had never done this before, we never talked about us, and I think it was because we were afraid of making it disappear. So we had always just accepted that we got along perfectly, that we were never apart. I didn't want to screw it up, no, that was the last thing I wanted, but I couldn't hold it in anymore. I had to tell her.

We were having a great time, as usual. We were both so happy together. She was having some steak. I don't remember what I had that night. It's not that important.

"I-I want to tell you," I started. This is the only time I was ever the slightest bit uncomfortable with her. "I want to tell you how important you are to me." She took a bite, but didn't take her eyes off me. "I've never been so happy or comfortable with anyone before," I continued.

But then I stopped. She was laughing. It was an ugly, mean laugh that I had never seen her use before. Well, no, maybe giggling at first, but it didn't matter. It got worse, and it truly hurt. She was laughing so hard that she didn't take the time to breathe. Her eyes were wide and she was starting to spasm.

My heart went back to nothing. I could feel all of the eyes upon me again, there in the corner of the room, and I was suddenly more uncomfortable than ever. "I - why are you doing this to me!" I cried at her, but she said nothing. Her eyes got a huge as her body twitched all the more violently.

Then (boomthwacksplat), her eyes were on my shirt. Her eyes were physically on my shirt. And she was still in her seat. Imagine my discomfort.

Of course, an ambulance was called immediately, but I knew it was of little use. She had already choked pretty thoroughly on her steak. I didn't see any possibility of her recovering. It didn't matter anymore.

So, here I am in the hospital waiting room. Everyone's looking at me. I have my dead girlfriend's eyes on my shirt, and I just don't know what to do. I guess I'm waiting for the doctor to come out and tell me she's dead, but it doesn't really mean anything to me. Maybe I'll go home and clean up my dog.

The Magic Wondershow

Proudly Presents:

The Festival

By Sean J. Stanley

Nestled in a deep rolling glen, just a hair shy of the Adirondack mountains, lies a sleepy New York town called Priapus Falls. It's a quaint little place, complete in its unobtrusive, unassuming melding of folk culture and the trappings of a bygone boomtown legacy. In 1839, the French trappers who established the locale for trading and provisioning had moved on, leaving the town in the capable hands of industrious Prussian and Bavarian traders and smiths. The town was known far and wide for two things. The first was the quality of craftsmanship in their durable goods, especially the patented reciprocating turn-belt healing device, guaranteed by its creator, Egmont Tornebole, to cure all forms of hysteria. Later, when its popularity had waned in favor of the questionable practice of marital counseling, the healing device plant was converted to a washing machine factory, turning out solid Sears & Roebuck laundry appliances ever since. The second, and far more commendable trait that the town was known for was its great propensity for spectacle.

No matter the time of year or how dire the circumstances, the good people of Priapus Falls always found a reason to celebrate. Presidents birthdays, remembrances, both secular and religious, federal holidays, you name it, it was cause enough to raise a glass. And with the long lineage of brewmeisters and nearly two-dozen secret family recipes, the Falls became a haven for ombibulous castaways during the prohibition years. Local lore held that Elliott Ness himself had several casks of Dempster Draught brought to his Cleveland field office after Capone was finally put away.

Unable to shake their Teutonic roots, Priapus Falls still is host to a great many spectacles. There was once tale of a Memorial Day parade in 1982 that ended with old Ackley and the boys from the fire company breaking into the National Guard barracks and stealing the tanks to take on parade. This would have undoubtedly caused a stir in the upper ranks had not the Mayor, Abelard Johanson, been a commissioned officer in Korea, and an auxiliary member of the Guard himself. They were reprimanded, to be sure, but the schoolboys who rode in the cavernous innards of those great metallic creatures knew better than the pragmatic grownups who admonished the culprits.

I've been privy to laments of all sorts, but none were as interesting than the yarn told to me by a fellow named Himes about this strange little place, and what it had in store for a stranger with an agenda. Trends come and go, as does the town's loyalty to various holidays, but nothing remains a steadfast part of life in Priapus Falls so much the legendary Bucket Festival, held every year in early October. Much has been said about the festival in its day, some good, some bad. Some say it's a matter of depraved lunacy to even set foot in town during the week long jubilee, others criticize its use of gambling as an official town fundraising stratagem. Moral conundrums aside, the Festival, as its colloquially known, has been around in one form or another since the founding of the town proper. Now, old Abelard Johanson, even at eighty-one had run for mayor the last thirty years, winning every time, his platform the staunch advocacy of all things epicurean, especially the Festival.

I don't have to tell you that the Rilchystre Womyn's Health Co-op would have nothing of this, and have been making a stir about the Festival since

they were but a glimmer in the eyes of the Woman's Temperance League. And with good reason; any tea-totaling old maid worth her bustle would shun the display of brotherhood and merriment, not to mention copious and conspicuous alcohol consumption and the particular buffoonery that quickly follows. Now, the real story begins here, in the confines of the co-op, one dreary Friday in October. On this particular October Friday, Joleen Lovelace was called into the office of her direct superior, a rather ugly and effeminate chap name Julio Whitefield, who's callow countenance presided over the business of things. A former Unitarian preacher, he looked after the donations, grants, and dues as well as the monthly newsletter, which freed up the commander in chief, Henrietta Prudeham to pursue the more important matters. Prudeham prepared and executed at least five or six fits of social despondence each year, and couldn't be bothered with the drudgery of office tasks.

"Leave that to our solitary male member," she would joke whenever something tedious had to be done.

And underneath that dubious distinction of solitary male member was Joleen, his assistant. Possessed of a markedly unhealthy zeal for the melodramatic, her life had been wrought against the tides of what she referred to as the "offensive and obscene", which included just about everything from penny whistles to the piano concertos of Liszt. She abhorred the vices of the flesh, loathed art, feared anything secular, and above all, she hated humor. Her eyes dare not cast upon any text, save for the King James Bible and the tiny script imprinted on the label of her *Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound*, of which she imbibed on numerous occasion to soothe the Prolapsus Uteri that had plagued her since her husband had shot himself in the head.

"This doesn't look good," he said.

"What?"

"This wretch Johanson seems to be predestined to die, most unfortunately, with his boots *on*," Whitefield said, slamming the morning edition into Joleen's lap. She read the headline:

Landslide - Johanson, Festival to Continue in Priapus

"Is this today's?"

"Hot off the press," he said, retrieving his snuff-box. "Vote was officially certified at midnight."

"What are we going to do?"

"If we can't get the local authorities to straighten things out, perhaps we can enlist the aid of our federal friends," he mused, replacing the lid on the snuff-box and turning to face Joleen. "This will require a woman on the inside," he said, a thin grin appearing on his oily face. "Let's see that charming Margaret Mead impression."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

The following morning, Joleen was on the east-bound train for Priapus Falls, a rapidly packed suitcase in her hand, and a head full of troubles. She resented Whitefield with a passion, a shell of a man working for a second-rate woman's institution, and he, he of all people had signed her up as a candidate for the Priapus Falls Bucket Queen. Her cover was flimsy at best; she was Joleen Atkinson, from Millersfield, Ohio. She had heard about the Festival from a friend who attended college in nearby Rilchystre and thought that if she won the money, she could pursue her dreams of becoming an actress.

She emerged from the rail station and saw that the town she was in resembled nothing of what she envisioned in her mind. It was bright and cheerful, plucked from a Norman Rockwell painting. Only thing was, this place was real. Real people went about their real business in a real fashion. Everyone said hello, pegging her for an outsider immediately. An older woman in a blue skirt approached her and smiled,

"Howdy, stranger. Here for the Festival?" She asked.

"Uh, yes. I'm uh, Joleen Atkinson from—"

"Joleen Atkinson from Millersfield, Ohio," the woman said, then quickly, "Idonia Craig, Festival Registrar and official Co-Host. We've been expecting you."

"I see that you have. Can you tell me where I might find a good Hotel?" Joleen asked.

"Hotel? Nonsense! You obviously haven't been

here before. All contestants will be staying at the pleasure of the Town, in the Magnolia Bed & Breakfast on Barkley Street. But first, let's get you ready. There's a welcome ceremony tonight and you'll need to look your best. Come on. I'll take you to Eartha, she'll fix you up real nice."

The Eartha in question was the sole proprietor of Eartha Putnam's Beauty Salon, who upon meeting Joleen, dressed her in a beauty smock, and waged a four hour campaign of cosmetic terror.

"Now, let's start by shaving those armpits and we must, by all means, do something about that infernal amount of brillo about your lower sundries," she said as Joleen squirmed in the waxing lounge.

When Eartha Putnam had finished, Joleen barely recognized herself in the mirror. She figured she'd end up looking like some sort of streetwalker, tarted up and on the make, but it wasn't that way at all. Eartha's reputation was well deserved. The simple touches here and there brought out qualities in Joleen that she herself had never recognized. Idonia dropped her off in front of a large Victorian manor home, which boasted a hand carved sign in the yard, "Welcome to the Magnolia Bed and Breakfast". She was greeted at the door by Mortimer Godfrey, who along with wife Hettie, ran the Magnolia. He took her heavy bags and led her up the curving staircase to her room. It was beautiful, to say the least, with a queen-sized bed, white lace curtains, and an antique chifferobe.

A soft knock and Joleen turned, only to be lept upon by a bright eyed teenage girl.

"Ohmygod, you're Joleen! We've totally been wondering what you'd look like and now you're here, ohmygod! Jenny! Jenny, Joleen's here!"

"Hi...uhh?"

"Oh. Sorry. Tessa. Tessa Schultz! Here here, Katie! Jenny, come on!"

The girls made short work of Joleen's insecurities. Discussions on matters of grave importance included what was going to be performed at the talent show, who was supplying the gowns this year, and whether or not Idonia Craig was secretly in love with

Mayor Johanson. Since this wasn't a beauty contest per-se, there was less backstabbing and

muscling for rank. When the excitement died down, Joleen took the opportunity to walk around for a spell, getting the lay of the land.

The town square had become the midway for the fair, with a massive grandstand. There vehicles of every shape and size, painted and decorated in every which way. A car with pennies glued to the hood was dwarfed by the massive ladder truck from the fire company. There were fire trucks, police cars, construction equipment. Jasper Jergenson, of Jergenson's Fair-Deal Chrysler had donated a brand new convertible this year. It sat on a dais, flanked by, of all things, a massive cement truck. It had a lovely red stripe swirling about its great mixing container, and there was "Bessie" written on it with scraggly letters, painted with love. Food vendors volleyed back and forth with sanctimonious offers for free samples, free beer, free cider, free commemorative chili bowl with every purchase, all perfectly executed fits of barking that would have given any seasoned carnie a run for his money. Joleen only succumbed to a few. She steered clear of the alcohol peddlers, but when offered sweets, she always partook, sometimes twice, as was the case with Mrs. Dalrymple's Double Almond Macaroons. Strange how it was. Even as the sun was waning in the sky, the festival was still going strong, and looked as if it would go on way into the night. And it did.

At seven PM, she returned to the Bed and Breakfast and found that her belongings had been neatly put away. There were also some foreign parcels, wrapped in brown paper, sitting on her bed. There was no note, however upon opening the package, she found the most beautiful evening gown she had ever seen. She threw it on immediately, its fit was precise, allowing her freedom and grace. She headed downstairs, where the other girls were waiting for the welcome ceremony to begin. A man in a faded brown blazer approached her. He bowed slightly and introduced himself as Mr. Corliss Bromley, owner and general manager of Bromley's Hardware.

"Care to dance?" He asked.

"Well," she hesitated. She didn't want to get too involved with these people. After all, her intent was to end the abominable practice. But something in her stirred and she relented. "Sure," she said.

The band was playing a waltz, and although she

had little dance experience, Bromley was a good lead, moving her body around the dance floor as gracefully as a swan. She would have swooned, had she not more pressing issues to attend to. She had to continue her investigation. He was such a strong lead, with fire behind his eyes, fire hot enough to melt the ice around any heart. After the number ended, Joleen bid farewell to Corliss Bromley and wandered over to the long wall that stretched across the back of the square. It was about six feet high and featured a corkboard surface, ideal for hanging notices, or photographs. Polaroid photographs of smiling men, taken in front of the bucket booths. There was only a handful now, but since the wall was at least sixty feet long, she could only wonder how many would be present on the following Saturday. Was this part of the ceremony?

The next few days were all pomp and circumstance. She and her fellow candidates attended sewing circles, went through barns and stables, the usual pieces for the Falls Tribune Gazzette and other such nonsense. But it was fun. There was an element of womanhood she hadn't encountered before, and that was the feeling of sisterhood she had with the other contestants. It was a feeling of belonging, encouragement even. Becoming the Festival Queen was now ancillary to the daily snippets of gossip she was now privy to. And since the ages ranged from high school girls like Tessa, to Mavis, who was Joleen's own age the conversations were always lively and varied. The hardest part she found, was mustering the courage to leave them at all. But in order for her to faithfully execute her charge, she had to explore on her own.

The bucket booths themselves were a far cry from what she imagined. They were looming structures, resembling the changing tents she had seen in old-time beach photographs, complete with candy apple stripes from top to bottom. Local rumor was that back in 07, an unscrupulous one ring circus proprietor was run out of town on a rail, leaving the massive framework of canvas and silk free to be used as the elders saw fit. Some felt that the fire department should use the tent for their annual bake sale, others felt that the tent could be put to better use as a shelter for the hobos who frequented the banks of the river under the railroad bridge. Many a young boy that summer argued that their tree houses and backyard hideouts could benefit from a sturdy canvas roof. After

several town meetings, an emergency town council assembly, a few poker and/or bowling outings, a decision was hammered out over drinks at the Waterin Hole. The Festival needed new bucket booths, and the local seamstress, Mrs. Albrecht was enlisted to render the appropriate shapes. Two weeks later, she and the quilting club, of which she was chairperson, erected the six large booths in the square for all to see. They stood there now, just as they did, ten feet high, opulent in their steadfast decay.

She trained her camera on the second booth in from the corner. An unassuming man in his thirties emerged, washing his hands with a moist towelette. She watched carefully as the festival clerk, Penrod Hastings, counted each and every dollar in his hand before taking the picture for the wall and allowing access to the assigned booth. So far, the entire event was far more casual than she had expected. There was no angry mob, nor was there a line even. The gentry milled about in the square, sipping cold beers, sampling the food, especially Osbert Sandifer's pulled pork barbecue. This local gastronomic concoction, which had won awards from Albany to Buffalo, only made appearances during special town events; although if you were kind enough to drop a few bottles of peppermint schnapps on Osbert's doorstep, you might notice a savory pot or two waiting for you after church on Sunday. No, the general chaos she had expected was nowhere to be seen. Mustering her courage, she approached Penrod and smiled. He smiled back, but didn't say anything, lost in his counting procedure. Satisfied with what she could only assume was the proper amount, he handed the man a receipt and aimed the Polaroid camera steady.

It wasn't until the last day of the festival that she actually saw a line. Penrod Hastings explained that the last two days were always the most crowded, due to the greater likelihood of viability. People from miles around made the pilgrimage to Priapus Falls to see the last days of the hub-bub. In a day and a half, the tiny town's infrastructure was stretched to its veritable limit, overwhelmed by an interminable influx of foreign spectators. Eldrige Dempster had to start selling ten foot square plots of land in front of the Dempster Motor Lodge just to accommodate them. The lines at the Bucket Booth stretched from the Square all the way down East Vine Street, terminating in front of

Roderick's Skeet and Trap Emporium.

This year's line featured several interesting additions; indeed it was a colorful montage of humanity, thanks to the VFW Ladies Auxiliary, who had spent the last three days recruiting every gentleman within a hundred mile radius. By canvassing every diner, truck stop, and watering hole this side of the Adirondacks, they had reached a wide spectrum of unsavories; every creature was eager to try his hand at winning the prize. A mongrel group of wayfaring truck drivers were presently standing in line, discussing matters of national politics with a caravan of College Students from the nearby Mechanics Institute. Even the bums were in on the action, allowed to contribute and thus possess a ticket as a sort of humanitarian gesture from the town council. Its funny, but the Festival had a way of making the strangest of strangers into the fastest of friends.

There was a bit of a row, however, when a sickly and sinewy personage, claiming to be an economics professor from Tufts University brought the line to a standstill. He had made it to Penrod Hastings' table and was demanded proof of legitimacy before he would proffer the coin of the realm.

"I assure you, this is a legitimate opportunity," Hastings said, "in accordance with State regulations on such matters. Technically, we fall under the auspices of the Off Track Betting Commission, with a special consideration due to our historical stature."

The ornery man licked his lips for a moment, and leered at Hastings, who maintained his gracious smile throughout the unpleasantness.

"There's something rotten about all this," he said.

"If you don't find that adequate, sir, you may always take your business elsewhere and allow these good people behind you to continue on."

The man harrumphed, but his picture was taken, and he scurried off to toss his chances into a bucket like the rest of them. On the last day of the festival, Joleen awoke early, anxiety getting the best of her. She went down the hall, where she found Tessa and several of the girls brushing their hair and chatting up a storm.

"Think about what it means to win!" One said. "A life, a dream, everything!" The others cried.

The bucket parade began sharply at nine, departing from the make-shift staging area. The St. Andrews Presbyterian auxiliary parking lot was full of John Deere or Farmall tractors pulling strange contraptions of every shape and size. Floats ranged from platforms with ribbon, to fanciful paper mache sculptures. Some even lit up and made noise. Joleen was late when she reported to the staging area, having spent a restless morning wrestling with her gown, a Victorian-era contraption, complete with petticoat and bloomers. The Royal Float was opulent indeed, a silver and white dias of paper mache, a veritable throne room on wheels. She and her fellow sisters mounted the high back chairs, a basket of roses shoved into their arms just as Ackley jerked the tractor into gear and scooted it off the tarmac. As the parade snaked across Main Street and into town, the contestants tossed their roses at spectators in the crowd who they thought were most worthy. She was amazed at how many people were there, and rooting for her. They cheered, holding up signs featuring her picture. A young boy of about five approached the float and held up a small box. Joleen had to reach down to retrieve it, nearly losing her balance in the process, but when she opened the box, she found a wondrous silver necklace with a lock of his hair. He smiled at her and then pointed to the small irregular patch behind his ear where his mother had carefully snipped. Joleen had to throw the rose, but he caught it and quickly vanished into the throng of spectators.

Ackley halted the tractor in front of the grandstand, surreptitiously expurgating his tobacco juice as he fastened the walkway to the stage. Each contestant filed off one by one to form a long line on the grandstand. The judges, flanked on either side by the Mayor and the Doctor, examined them for a moment. They walked back and forth a few paces around each, then the Judges retreated to a corner of the stage where they mumbled a few things. Some girls were asked to turn around in circles, others were directed to open their mouths and show their teeth. When it was clear that a decision had been made, Mayor Johanson was called over, for he as the MC had the honor after all.

"Ladies and Gentleman, I give you this year's Bucket Festival Queen!"

And when he raised none other than Joleen's hand, the cheers could have shaken the mountains to the ground. Never before had she felt such an outpouring of love. Flowers and candies were tossed at her feet. It was hard for her to hold back the tears of joy, even harder still to remember exactly why or how she had gotten here. The judges stood, walking single file to where she was, they shook her hand. Mayor Johanson produced a velvet lined box and from it emerged forth a wondrous tiara. It had been hand-crafted in sterling silver, and its apex featured a jewel in what appeared to be a teardrop.

"This is so beautiful"

"We had it handmade," he said. "In Germany," he added. "Wear it with pride, for you are the first stranger to be given the honor."

"Stranger?"

"Well, you certainly didn't grow up here, did you. But rest easy, my dear. From now on, your heart has a place to nest itself, should you ever need a respite from the cold."

The tears came now. A trickle at first, but by the time old Johanson had finished with her, she was sobbing to beat the band. The band which owed its unique sound to its mix matched pedigree, a motley juxtaposition of the High School Marching Band and any local with notions of musical stardom, was not to be outdone. They struck up the official Festival theme, a depraved version of Artie Shaw's Begin the Beguine, with Artie's signature clarinet replaced by the drunken musings of Connor McPhail's trusty bagpipe. As this cacophony was going on, the judges helped Joleen get into the wheel.

It was referred to only as "The Wheel", and its most likely origin was the same as the booth canvas. Identical in design to the wheels that the gypsy knife throwers employ to demonstrate their craft, it featured leg and arm shackles, as well as an adjustable shoulder cushion for when the hapless target was fully inverted. It has been given the once over by the local furniture upholster, who replaced the soft blue velveteen each year. Her arms were extended, as were her legs. She was surprisingly comfortable; the shackles were wrapped in the same velveteen that shrouded the wheel, so only a slight pressure was felt.

The band's pace quickened as the officials backed away and released the stops, which held the wheel fast in its upright position. She forgot her motion sickness. Too late to say anything, the wheel began to spin on its axis. When she was nearly upside down, she expected a knife to be thrown at her throat. They had found her out somehow and were going to sacrifice her for her rudeness. But no knife came, nor did the wheel make a full rotation. Instead, it was locked into place fully inverted, with her fully inverted and still upon it. The fire chief made sure that Joleen's breathing snorkel was clear from any obstructions before giving Idonia Craig the go-ahead to slide back the petticoat and lift the small flap on her bloomers.

"I was scared too, dearie. But you'll be fine," she said.

Old Ackley spit again, then lined up the sluice gate in Joleen's general direction. They used to pour the buckets by hand, but technology over the years had allowed the action to take place in half the time. The mayor, winked at the crowd, gave a salutary thumbs-up, and pulled the golden lever on the cement truck, releasing its contents in a deluge of pearlescent glory. It was magnificent. Gallons upon gallons of frothy liquid poured out from the belly of the cement truck, down the snaking sluice, and onto Joleen's body. She was instantly covered from head to toe in a baleneation of bucketed secretion. When Ackley's foot slipped off the brake pedal and hit the gas by mistake, old Bessie blew forth a even larger salvo, splattering the row of small children who had muscled their way to the front of the grandstand to get a better look. Joleen, who shunned the snorkel at first, was glad of it. Her heart was pounding and she would've surely drowned had she not had assistance.

But all she could hear was the cheering.

When it was over, she was upended once again and Idonia took a fine silk handkerchief to her eyes, wiping away the gelatinous remnants.

"Need to blow your nose, honey?"

The fire brigade took the hose from Tanker 2 and trained it on Joleen's writhing body. A few minutes of harsh hydration and she was cleaned from head to toe, wet to be sure, and as pathetic looking as a soggy kit-

ten. But her spirits perked up as the cheering continued.

Nine months later, Joleen was the proud mother of a beautiful baby boy. It was paraded by the spectators who eyed the child and then eyed the photographs on the wall. When all votes came to bear, it was evident that the good people of Priapus Falls knew their man when they saw him. Nearly all votes went to that strange man who bullied Hastings at the booth. The name below the photograph read Valmert Dramonie, but he hadn't been seen in those parts since that day in October.

It was tradition that in the event that the father was not around for the second part of the Festival, the Queen herself could choose any king. Naturally, Joleen selected Corliss Bromely as the winner and after a festive night of public drunkenness, the couple retired to raise the child and manage the winnings, which totaled around five hundred thousand dollars. The Rilchystre Womyn's Health Co-Op never got their dirt, and according to Himes, shortly after he saw headline photos of Jolene winning the Bucket Queen prize, old Julio Whitehead went home and hung himself in the closet, never to darken the door of another printing establishment again.

Letters received by GDT are unedited for spelling, grammar, or content.

Date: Sun Dec 15, 2002
10:36:39 AM US/Pacific
From: Molly Dorsey
Subject: gdt illustrations

hey,im a regular veiwer of your magazine and recently i was slightly dissapointed in the visuals. The last issues cover was a crude illustration of a hand of some sort. It didnt seem to fit what the magazine promotes. I enjoy the covers with those characters on them,for example, the "boring cute love" cover.Those i think are more honest and suitable,i think you should stick with that style of artwork regularly. Thanks!
Loyal,

Molly

Molly,

It is generally our belief that the magazine promotes literature, art, satire, and humor in many forms. As such, there exists a plethora of styles which are suitable for publication. Favoring exclusively a single particular style would be counterproductive to our goals, since we would then be limiting the creative input of our contributors. We encourage anyone to submit, and to summarily reject a piece because it isn't similar to the "boring cute love" cover would simply be antithetical to our designs.

Again, we encourage anyone to submit, and we'd love to see what you've got if you do any illustrating. Either way, thanks for your comments. We always enjoy hearing from our readers, especially our loyal ones.

-Ed.

What is this magazine?

This is Gracies Dinnertime Theatre, a magazine of satire, literature, poetry and art. We publish out of Rochester, NY but we have readers around the globe. We exist as a medium for your expression and invite you to contribute.

Anyone is welcome to submit.

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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

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My grandmother's gasp after reading our last musical inspiration