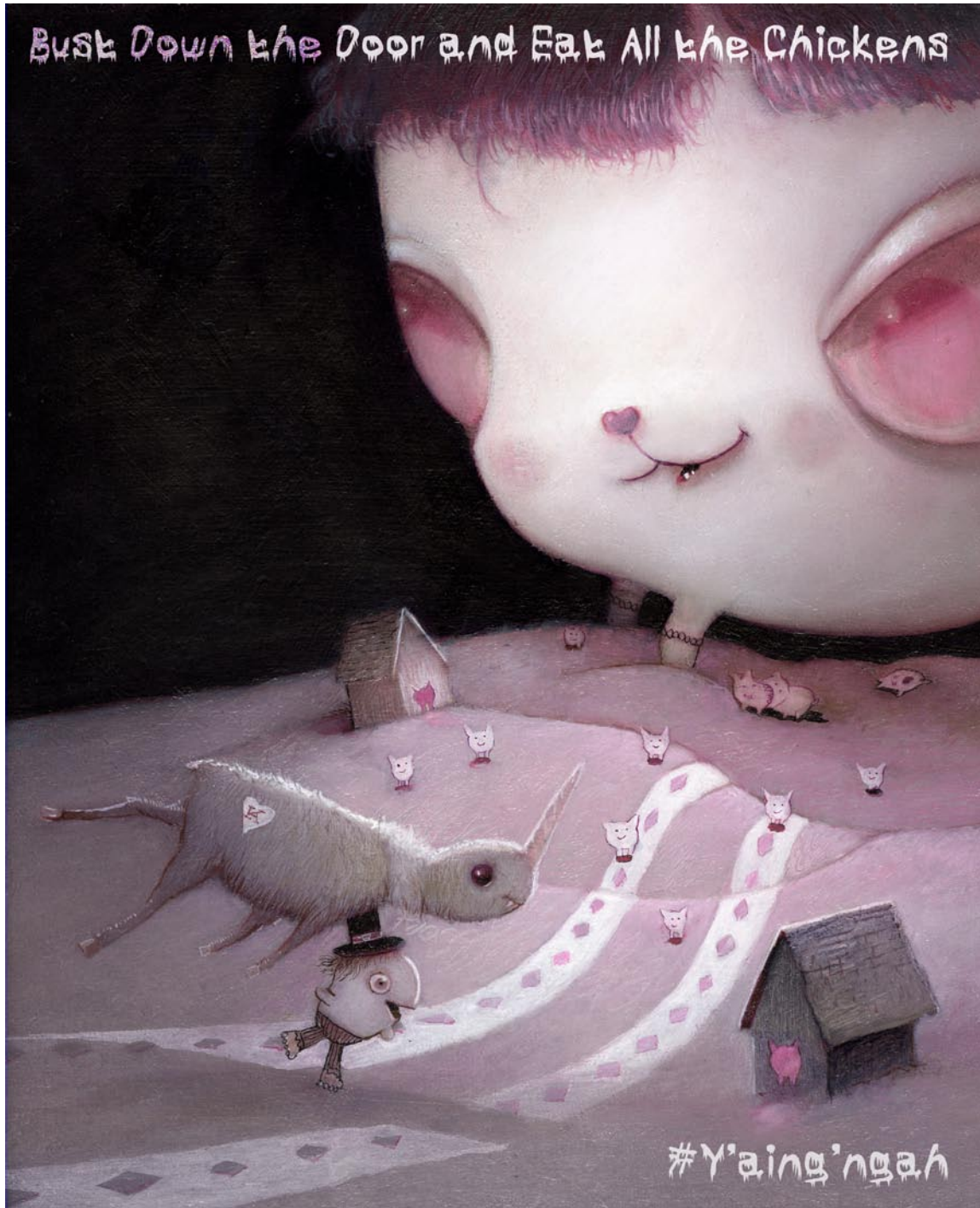


Bust Down the Door and Eat All the Chickens



#Y'aing'ngah

Copyright © 2010 the individual authors

Editor-in-Chief: Bradley Sands

Associate Editor: Garrett Cook

Assistant Editor: Andersen Prunty

Additional Readers: Mike Young and Jason Calsyn

Cover art by Kristian Adam
(cover art copyright © 2010 Kristian Adam)

Additional assistance with cover by Jeffrey Kaminski

email: bradleysands@comcast.net

website: www.absurdistjournal.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1001 THINGS TO DO BEFORE, AS, AND AFTER YOU DIE Mykle Hansen	4
CHANGING WOMAN Brandi Wells	6
TOO MANY SUBJECTS Gabe Durham	11
THERE'S WAR R.E. Greene	14
CIRCLE SLASH ERECTIONS xTx	17
THE BOOK OF THE THREE LITTLE PIGS (BIBLE VERSION) Jeff Lawhead	18
YOUTH TO BE PROUD OF Nicole Cushing	21
A REVIEW OF D. HARLAN WILSON'S <i>PECKINPAH</i> Garrett Cook	26
A REVIEW OF L.V. RAUTENBAUMGRABNER'S <i>AS I WAS CUTTING AND OTHER NASTINESSES</i> Garrett Cook	27
CONTRIBUTOR BIOS	28

1001 THINGS TO DO BEFORE, AS, AND AFTER YOU DIE

by Mykle Hansen

BEFORE YOU DIE:

Wake up! Meet your new family. Snuggle. Vomit. Learn a foreign language. Try some salami. Try finger-painting. Cover your ears. Get in touch with your emotions. Read a book about kittens. Jump as high as you can! Visit a doctor. Visit a dentist. Have a special feeling. Do as you're told.

Take some classes. Meet new people. Try on a new outfit. Make new friends. Ride a bicycle. Discover math. Watch educational television. Fight. Lose. Prefer the color blue. Wonder about death. Feel strange.

Grow a mustache. Try on some new pants. Stretch! Look at yourself in a mirror. Go dancing! Smell new people. Learn about skin care. Gargle. Kiss somebody. Take a nap. Have a special feeling. Read a coming-of-age novel.

Get a job. Buy a new outfit. Buy a car. Work. Come of age. Quit your job. Buy another new outfit. Go dancing! Discover beer. Rediscover math. Worry about money. Get pre-approved. Go dancing! Meet more new people. Make more friends. Discover more beer. See a foreign film about emptiness. Get back in touch with your emotions.

Go to a church. Make new friends. Read selected Bible passages. Study flower arranging. Eat donuts. Discover wine. Kneel. Wonder about death. Wait for a sign. Continue to wait. Give up waiting. Discover whiskey.

Move to a new town. Get a job. Learn to smoke. Wonder about death. Worry about money. Rediscover beer. Smoke. Discover malt liquor. Go for a drive. Kill somebody.

Visit your local police station. Visit your regional prison. Read the Bible. Read the dictionary. Explore weightlifting. Explore your sexuality. Play chess. Get a tattoo. Do nothing. Do as you're told.

Return from prison. Jump as high as you can! Stretch! Buy a new outfit. Get a job. Work. Try to be good. Go to church. Make a joyful noise! Meet new people. Fall in love. Get married. Have a baby. Stay up all night. Try to quit smoking. Read a book about kittens. Watch the sunrise.

Worry about money. Work. Get a second job. Work. Stay up all night. Go to church. Work. Learn to cook. Learn about pediatric medicine. Learn about finance. Visit a pawn shop. Call your relatives. Learn about human nature. Get back in touch with your emotions. Hit a baby.

Rediscover malt liquor. Smoke. Go for a long walk. Cross a busy street. Feel a truck.

AS YOU DIE:

Scream. Jump as high as you can! Flinch. Bleed. Twitch. Agonize. Quit smoking. Await rescue. Reflect on past experience. Consider a new career. Scream some more. Bleed. Try to wiggle your toes. Wonder about death. Apologize. Wait. Meet new people. Ride in an ambulance. Visit a hospital. Attempt to breathe. Remain hopeful. Try not to die. Remember things you were supposed to do. Make plans. Regret everything. Float at the edge of being. Move toward the light. Expire.

AFTER YOU DIE:

Lie in state. Visit a morgue. Attend a funeral. Enter a hole. Experience dirt. Remember having lived once. List everything you'd do differently, if you only could. List it again. Wait. Rot. Enjoy occasional visits from family members. Watch them die. Enjoy occasional visits from the groundskeeper. Watch him die. Watch everybody die. Watch time die. Wait. Picture an end. Know you won't get it. Wait. Dream of oblivion. Know you won't get that either. Wait and wait and wait and wait and wait. Wish you had something to read. Continue to wait. Continue to rot.

WHEN JESUS FINALLY COMES TO TAKE YOU HOME:

Wake up! Meet your new family. Apologize. Grovel. Be polite. Learn a new instrument. See some old friends. Do as you're told.

CHANGING WOMAN by Brandi Wells

Even his wife's bangs are gone, replaced by endless forehead. Every way she turns, forehead. Eyes and ears and freckles slide down, collecting in runny lumps around her collar so all he can see is that luminous forehead.

She polishes it with the Turtle Wax he uses on his Civic hatchback. She smells like sweet mints and glistens like new. Sometimes he pulls her close and kisses that expansive forehead. Sometimes it takes everything he has to keep from licking it. Sometimes he wants to bite it, wants to grind the skin between his teeth and suck the sweet wax down.

"Can you pick up eggs?" she asks one morning as he's leaving. "On your way home?"

He leans back inside, holding the doorframe and asks does she want six eggs or twelve?

Her eyes and nose and mouth are now properly aligned on her face. The all-encompassing forehead is gone, replaced by features that might be more symmetric and exquisitely formed than before.

She walks across the room, grabs his collar with both hands and kisses him. He pulls away. Her lips feel like mush. Malleable, too indefinite.

He leaves for work, longing for the concrete assuredness and structure of her forehead. The smooth and featureless expanse of face, unmarked by blemish or shaded by protrusion.

Over dinner, a six-egg chicken frittata, baked fluffy and crusted with cheddar cheese, her eyes begin to droop. They sink below her nose and then swing back up. They crawl around the sides of her head and rest behind her ears like unbroken yolks. They waver there, threatening to drip onto her shoulders.

"Stop," he says, and her chewing slows.

She swallows, puts her fork down, and does something that isn't really staring because her eyes are behind her. She is facing him and her nose is pointing at his nose. He doesn't say anything else, but continues staring. She gives up, dumps the rest of her frittata in the trash, and goes to the bathroom.

He finishes his plate and then has seconds. When the pan is empty, he considers scooping hers off the top of the trash, but doesn't. Instead, he knocks on the bathroom door.

"You okay?" he asks.

He tries the knob, but the door's locked.

"Open up," he says.

When she doesn't, he pulls his wallet out and cards the latch with his driver's license until it clicks. He pushes the door open.

She sits in the bathtub, no water, with her knees pulled up to her chest. The shower curtain is draped over her shoulder and wrapped under her legs, as though it had meant to cradle her.

"What's wrong?" he asks. He can't see her eyes.

She shakes her head.

He kneels beside her, holding the edge of the tub and leaning back.

"What's wrong?" he asks again.

She sucks her lips in, cups her hand beneath her mouth, and spits. Saliva and egg mush splatter across her hand, so she spits again until one eyeball and then the other land in her palm, dripping with yellow mucus.

He pokes one of the eyeballs, but she shirks away, closing her hand and holding it beneath her chin.

He says goodnight and leaves her in the bathroom.

In bed, he runs a finger along his eyebrow and his lashes and then rubs his eye. He blinks and stares up at what would be the ceiling if he could see that far.

* * *

It is weeks later and he notices she is floating instead of walking. It's subtle. Her feet are quite close to the floor and she still lifts her knees and swings her legs forward, as though she is walking, but he knows she isn't.

While she's asleep, he coats the bottom of her shoes with superglue and presses them firmly to the floor. The next morning he wakes to her screaming, to muffled throaty noises with no consonants, to muted vowels at varying frequencies and pitches.

He thinks that she is screaming something like, "What did you do?"

Her hair is covering her face so he can't tell if her eyes are in the right place.

He takes hold of her wrist and she says words that might be, "Let me go," or "Help me," but he's not listening. He is concentrating on holding her wrist. The other wrist is flailing about, trying to help the first wrist, but he is too strong for it. If both wrists were free, they might have a chance, but with one of them caught like this, he is a sure victor.

When she tires herself out, he lets her go. Her body is limp as she settles onto the floor in a half-lying-half-sitting position.

"I can't understand you," he says.

She grunts, leaning forward so he can't see her face.

"I just can't understand you," he says.

Her voice is shrill and prolonged, coming out in grunts and then moans.

He gets up, brushes his teeth, and drives to work. In the car, he repositions the rear view mirror so he can see himself. He opens his mouth as wide as he can and yells, eyes open, staring down his throat. Then he covers his mouth with one hand and yells again.

* * *

He comes home the same time as any other day. He pulls into the driveway and sits in the car for a few minutes until all the cool air has leaked away and been replaced by the muggy Georgia heat.

He uses the house's side entrance and kicks his shoes off next to the washing machine as he walks through to the kitchen.

His wife is sitting on the living room couch with her back to him, watching one of her programs. He doesn't know which one.

The kitchen trash can is toppled over and scraps of food are strewn across the floor. Wet coffee grounds streaked into the grout. A broken mayonnaise jar, its glass scattered all the way to where the living room carpet begins. Also, blood sprayed across the tile. Blood inked into the carpet. Blood smeared across the table and along the countertops. Blood dripping from the broken kitchen window. The curtains are torn down and crammed into the garbage disposal. Most of the drawers hang open, their knobs gummy with blood.

“What happened?” he asks.

She doesn't answer. Doesn't move.

He hears a thumping, a fluttering noise coming from the foyer.

He steps over the trash, blood staining the bottom of his socks.

His wife's hand crawls across the foyer, hits the wall, flops to the ground, backs up a few feet and does it again. The hand is smeared red and lightly covered with coffee grounds. He reaches for the hand, but it skitters across the floor toward the kitchen.

He finds the other hand sitting next to his wife on the couch. It appears the two of them are watching television together.

“What happened?” he asks her.

The hand clenches its fingers and then relaxes, but his wife doesn't move. If she's breathing, it isn't noticeable. No rising and falling of the chest. No flaring of the nostrils. Just the watching.

He sits on the other side of the hand and stares at his wife. He wishes she would talk to him. He wishes she would be the woman she used to be.

He moves the hand to the other side of the couch and holds her limp body, squeezing her. Ribs crack, bones bend. He folds her. Knots her. He makes her into a nice little cube. Maybe the cube is rough, mangled and uneven, but it is manageable. He can carry it places. Store it easily. Pull it out when he needs to. This is the way with their love.

Even after he has made her into a cube, her hands still crawl and tramp about the house. Her right hand is a constant source of discord. It claws at doors, cracks windows, breaks the toilet lid off, shatters it, and attempts to flush the pieces down the drain. Sometimes he finds the hand beneath the coffee table, trying to unfold his wife's body.

The left hand is nothing but a joy to him. Tame and docile. Comes when he calls it. Perches beside him while he watches television and across from him while he eats dinner. At night the hand lies on his pillow, inches from his face, and he strokes the thumb and knuckles, gently tracing the fingernails. He falls asleep with the palm pressed between his cheek and pillow.

One morning he finds the two hands fighting in the living room. The right hand is trying to unbend his wife's body while the left keeps trying to coil it up again.

He stoops and grabs them both. Each hand has broken fingers and scratches from the other's nails. He locks them in separate windowless rooms where they can bleed until they are calm.

His wife's body lies crumpled on the living room floor. Her skin is pale with deep purple patches and creases and yellow tinges along her neck. He pets her short, clumped-together hair. He can hear a banging sound. Probably one of the hands battering against the door to get free.

He rolls her back up, crushing her into a compact cube, weighing her down with a stack of books he hasn't read. She is an easy fit.

He hears more banging from the back of the house. He thinks of the right hand and contemplates the cheese grater. He contemplates the blender.

TOO MANY SUBJECTS

by Gabe Durham

The technician was scheduled to be at the lab, but he'd recently reconciled with his wife and had been blowing off responsibilities all week.

The technician's assistant waited until five after the hour, then proceeded without the technician. He handed a pill and a water cup to each of the eleven subjects and when he said, "Now," they swallowed simultaneously. Results are as follows:

One died.

Another died.

Another said, "I feel *great*," then died.

Another grew two inches, which is what she'd always said was her ideal height. She jumped with her arm raised, but couldn't quite touch the ceiling.

Another won \$10,000 in a sweepstakes. The sweepstakes man looked nervous as he stepped over a dead subject and handed the winning subject her oversized check. The technician's assistant asked the sweepstakes man, "Was it the pill that made you come?" The sweepstakes man saw an opportunity for a dirty joke, which was good for Comedy but bad for Science.

Another realized life was precious and kept it to herself.

Another realized life was meaningless and sang it over and over in a sassy voice, which made the life is precious woman doubt herself a little.

Another screamed. The technician's assistant rushed over and asked her what she was feeling. She said she thought she might die. The technician's assistant watched her closely. A moment passed. She shrugged. He moved on.

Another had her sense of smell amplified, caught the faintest hint of bacon, and burst out of the lab.

The technician's assistant shut the door after her and reminded the subjects that anyone who chose to leave the experiment early would get paid zippola. (He didn't like having to be so firm but what can you do?) The technician's assistant wrote furiously in his notebook, trying to record everything. He missed a lot. There was too much happening. There were too many subjects.

The technician's split, like that of others, had been over cheating. Not just cheating but you know...The technician was a good guy, I think, but he'd watched his own parents take turns hurting each other with some success and an opportunity had disrobed in front of him after an evening trial. He hesitated before saying no, then the script took hold and they wound up on the tile floor, together undulating in the chalky residue of experiments long past. The technician felt awful about it, but still saw the woman three more times, then one night his wife asked him if he felt like some pasta, and he confessed. Then some dark times. And yet there he was, this moment driving up a backcountry road, his hand on his wife's thigh.

The woman who smelled bacon ran out of the woods just then, right in front of the technician's car, her nose in the air, her eyes closed. He braked hard and missed her by inches. "Maniac," the technician's wife murmured. *I deserve that*, the technician thought.

Another subject realized which religion was the one true faith, forgot it, sneaked another pill into her mouth, and died.

The sweepstakes man, who was in heavy debt, asked if he could replace the woman who'd run off. The technician's assistant had him sign a waiver, then gave him a pill. The sweepstakes man had his sense of smell amplified, and ran off, following the bacon smell. The technician's assistant shut the door after him.

The dead subjects rose and pontificated. They said, "What is death anyway?" A cliché but a stumper.

Another subject kissed the man standing beside her.

Another remembered he had plenty to offer women and should never have given up dating, and considered asking the woman who was kissing him on a date.

When the female kisser noticed the technician's assistant watching them and taking notes, she felt her privacy was being invaded. She hacked the assistant's right arm off with a nearby axe (its presence another of the technician's reconciliation-related oversights – he'd also left a number of his loaded guns lying around the lab, but these, mercifully, do not factor in), which slowed the assistant's recording and he missed even more details. There was too much happening. There were too few limbs.

Everyone was getting restless now, some a little embarrassed at how quickly they'd grown accustomed to and bored with their premises and reversals and re-reversals. They were savvy. They had TVs.

But they had a point. Labs were no place to spend a morning, not if you had realized

something or grew two inches or died and, on the third minute, risen. One of the dead subjects found the cash box and paid everyone the agreed upon amount, along with a small bonus. "Go on, take it," he said to the woman who'd realized life was precious. "We've all earned it!" The physician's assistant called out as if to stop her, but his heart wasn't in it. He missed his arm.

Once paid, the subjects went out the back door, looked at their watches, and realized they had two more hours until their rides were scheduled to pick them up.

So the whole gang marched into town, where the gay rights parade had already begun. All their rides were there, killing time until the agreed upon pick-up hour. The subjects took up the back of the parade, happy to reveal their new peculiarities to a famously tolerant public.

In the parade was a man in a Speedo, velvet gloves, and face paint who had signed up to be a parade marcher and a subject in that morning's study without realizing the conflict until the night before, when he'd called and left an apologetic message on the lab voicemail. He wasn't thinking of that now. He was thinking about a wiry kind-eyed guy in a boa strutting a few yards ahead, the cool wind on his back, and about an upcoming Mormon-funded proposition that had to do with him.

The technician's assistant gave up recording and swallowed a pill and found he could recite the complete works of Dante, which was good for the Canon but neutral for Science. He took another pill and his bleeding shoulder scabbed over. When the technician's assistant saw his girlfriend in the crowd, he held up his detached arm to wave to her and she cracked up.

Also in the crowd were two ex-subjects, each breathing deeply, each holding a large paper plate of bacon, each eating it too fast.

Also in the crowd was the technician, making out with his wife. *She forgives me*, the technician thought. *I don't know why, but she does.*

The subjects marched on, tears in many of their eyes, thinking about the importance of hospital visitation rights and of how good it feels to be out in the sun, enjoying the day.

THERE'S WAR by R.E. Greene

There's war outside these walls. Its rumbles come from my east wall, especially when I am alone in the house.

The makers of the plans have dictated that war shall not affect any group of individuals numbering over fifteen. Preferably the effects of wars should be mitigated to affect the lowest number of people in a household at any time. Ideally, only when people are alone or with immediate family will the full sounds of war reach them.

Work is a place I walk to every day. Places of employment are required to be within walking distance of a person's capabilities. For example, if you are a hairdresser you are thus required to live within three miles of the hair salon. This is done to cut down on the diminishing fossil fuels which are mostly reserved for use in war.

I teach a class on filling out applications. Applications are important in a world at war. There are job applications. Housing applications. Baby applications. Marriage applications. Laser eye surgery applications. Work exemption applications. Fraud applications. Military enlistment application classes are taught by government officials. Military enlistment application classrooms are required to be located in the center of every town with a population of over 2000 persons.

The Committee for Sound Reduction indicated there was an increased prevalence of frequency loss due to war-related noise pollution. The Committee drafted legislation and passed laws regulating the sounds of war to be confined to households of human residence by installing war audio transmission devices within residential walls and banning war audio transmission from the city sirens.

Tuesdays and Thursdays are the days I teach Marriage Applications. Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays are when I teach Job Applications. Fraud Applications is taught on Tuesdays. Laser Eye Surgery Applications and Work-Exemption Applications are taught Saturday mornings. Housing Applications is taught Thursdays and Fridays. Baby Applications is taught Mondays and Wednesdays.

The only time when noise pollution rules are forgone is when The President comes to town. When The President comes to town, sirens blare from speakers placed on poles spaced every five miles. When the sirens sound everyone is required to run to their houses screaming at the top of their lungs. The President comes to town dressed in his war garb, with bicycle reflectors adorning his leather jacket and golden pendants hanging from his neck. Each wrist is shackled to a thick chain that trails behind him. The two chains are held by thirty slaves each. They try to hold back his fury at the enemy, but cannot. In his right hand he carries a whip that is dipped daily in tar and varnished

in broken glass. In his left hand he carries an unread, laminated copy of the Bible.

When The President comes to town he declares new laws and kicks over trash cans and whips the mailboxes. If The President catches anyone screaming and running to their house, he will tie them to a tree, where he punishes them for their lack of concern for the war with thirty lashes each. The people who are caught running to their houses not screaming are declared enemies of the state by The President. A helicopter is flown in by black uniformed Marines, who put old fashioned moneybags over the enemies' heads and fly the captives off to interrogation cells in secret detention centers.

The President comes to town in a caravan of limousines. There is a limousine for The President and one for each of his family members. There are twelve limousines for his slaves. There are eight limousines for his forty-eight body guards. There is a limousine for the plan makers who keep track of the new laws that The President declares. Half of the plan makers pass the new laws over to Congress. The other half write retraction bills for The President's new laws and pass those over to Congress. All of this is communicated to the Congress via satellites with encrypted data.

The President's 26-year-old daughter wears a sparkling red cocktail dress, sneakers, and nothing else. Her hair is blonde and curly and her mouth is always covered in a generous amount of red lipstick. The President's daughter is locked in her limousine and escorted by ten eunuchs who are sworn to keep her from escaping. However, The President's daughter emulates Houdini and is always inventing new ways to escape. The President's daughter is highly desired by many men as she is the most tantalizingly-unclean of the forbidden fruits.

When she escapes she'll run to a house and bang on the door. If a woman answers, The President's daughter usually runs to another house until she finds one with an unaccompanied man inside. It is said that she will embrace him, lean in close to him, whisper naughty things in his ear. Then she'll undress him before undressing herself. It is said she says life is about loving life. It is said she says she just wants to be free; free to love everyone with all the fibers of her mortal body.

If a man is caught with The President's daughter, he'll be labeled a child molester and sentenced to prison for eternity. Once the man dies he does not receive a burial. Instead, his body is left to rot in the cell in hopes of deterring other degenerates from committing depraved acts against children. The plan makers had to declare a new law allowing these cells to be reused so they would not become burial chambers. The cells are littered with the bones of perverts.

The day after The President leaves is officially called a War Effort Day. A War Effort Day brings the community together. Everyone is required to go to the application center where I work to receive clean-up assignments. People are assigned into groups. Some

groups are created to clean the streets of trash strewn by The President, others to fix broken mailboxes. Children are often assigned the task of repainting the houses where The President wrote graffiti demanding the lives of the terrorists and praising God for choosing him to fight for the side of good against the evil peoples of the world. On a War Effort Day we work outside of our houses where the noise of war from our walls cannot reach us. This helps us remember that one day we will all reap the silence of peace in our own homes if we all do our best to support the war daily in our actions and our thoughts.

CIRCLE SLASH ERECTIONS

by xTx

I have no sexual prowess. Inability to engorge penises is my specialty. If you feel 'boners are bothersome,' look no further. I am the girl for you.

If you enjoy your penis in its flaccid state, give me a call. I will awkwardly fumble around in your crotch using my face, mouth, and hands. After bumping your nuts softly with my forehead for twelve minutes, you might want to encourage me to try using my mouth. I will make motorboat sounds against your limp noodle for a while and you might stifle a giggle because, while not eliciting feelings of ecstasy, it does tickle a bit, and oh what a funny sound it makes!

At that point I might recollect a porno or two and decide to fellate you properly. I'll take you into my mouth and gargle your listless member like it was congealed Listerine. You – with your head resting on your arms crossed so casually behind your head – will marvel at my incompetence. You will think, "My dick hasn't been this soft since that one time I accidentally watched that beheading video. This girl is truly amazing!"

I will struggle for maybe an hour while you never get hard. You will especially enjoy when I use the backs of my hands to trap your droopy wiener and softly rub it back and forth like a germaphobe attempting to create fire from sticks. You will watch it twist and untangle, twist and untangle: a peach-colored festival toy.

Whenever I look up to your eyes – so full of failure that I am a hair's breadth from crying – you will whisper, "You're doing fine, really." Even though I think you're lying, your smile is so kind that I get back to work, playing the 'where's your nose' game with the four inches of floppy flesh you have so graciously chosen to share with my ineptitude.

Your ejaculation is my hard work. Your climax is my perseverance. Your nut bust is my can-do attitude. Your orgasm is my never-say-die determination in the face of mounting failure.

Nobody has ever worked so hard for you, accomplishing nothing, but so content in the trying.

Could this be love? you'll think, and later, when we're both quiet and resting from it all, you'll ask me questions that matter. You'll commit my answers to memory because now, you want to try....for me.

THE BOOK OF THE THREE LITTLE PIGS (BIBLE VERSION)

by Jeff Lawhead

1.

¹In the land of Leid, shortly after the year of Greisth, on the third day of the eleventh month in observance of Ele'ben'thrah, the deliverance of sovereign grace from the Lord, our God, between the mountains of Negeb and Morabah, which were ruled by the King of Og, Fay'shellom'ashis, lived a family of Pigs by the reedsides and the stone gardens; Kyashallom and his three sons, Solomon, the wisest son; Meridikai, the foolish son; and Karrash, the son of no fixed intelligence. ²Shortly after his children came of age, Kyshallom took them to the hills of Setruthuliam, east of the land of Gorohorn where King Zelo'phead ruled from the city of Ilb, ³and there the Lord spoke to Solomon and Meridikai and Karrash at the foot of the hill.

⁴"I am the Lord, your God, who delivered you from strife and suffering in the year of Exodus, the fourth month of Fast, from the lands of Slaughter, from Jimmy Dean, the Pharaoh of Sausage. ⁵Behold, these are the words I command to you that you will keep in reverence all the days of your life. "

⁶"Thou shalt not a burden to your farmhand be."

⁷"Thou shalt not squeal the Lord's name in vain."

⁸"Thou shalt not consume food in the lands where thou hast defecated and thou shalt not commit adultery with thy neighbor's ass or spread thy seed to any neighboring mammal of exquisite feathers or girth."

⁹"Remember the Suckling Day and keep it holy."

¹⁰"Thou shalt not boil a kid in its mother's milk."

¹¹"Thou shalt not engage the temptation to frolic in thy own filth or the filth of others. Thou shalt keep thy flesh pure in honor of the Lord. Thus says the Lord, your God."

¹²The next day, when they returned to their land, Kyashallom said onto his sons, "It is time that you withdrew from the house of Swine to build houses of your own, to which then you will seek wives and bear seven children of your own and repopulate the land with our people." And they left the house of their father. ¹³Karrash built his house of reeds found next to the river Hezebell in the land of the Gentiles which had no ruler. ¹⁴Meridikai built his house of wet sand and mustard seeds 1,600 cubits away from his brother, Karrash. ¹⁵Solomon, a skilled carpenter, built his house upon the rocks, of cement and brick, in a village near the Jewish city of Hahbollah in the province of Magog

under the rule of Neirdu, the seventh son of Gilgamith. ¹⁶Solomon worked hard every day out of forty weeks to please his father, to please the Lord, and honor the house of Swine. But Karrash and Meridikai did not honor the commandments of the Lord, their God. ¹⁷They drank many jars of swine wine every night, gambled in the streets every afternoon, and slept with many women every morning. ¹⁸Meridikai became very lazy and Karrash became fat like a hog.

2.

¹Where upon this time the devil, in the form of a wolf, came to the land of Leid, at the beginning of the year of Rachel, the tenth month of Vapors, to prey upon these swine. ²At this time they were lazy and full of sloth. They stumbled as they walked and fell into much of their own filth. The hungry beast made them prey and descended upon them. ³He arrived first at the house of Karrash. He knocked upon the door calling, "Little Pig, Little Pig, let me in!"

⁴Karrash was scared and did not know what to do, and he was filled with much shame as he used God's word in vain. ⁵"He who rapes this house of its occupants shall find the wrath of God!" he called back.

⁶The devil called again, "Little pig, little pig, let me in!" ⁷Karrash became scared again and called upon the honor of his father, "As my father before me, a great leader of the Pig army, said to the invaders of the temple of Pork, ⁸'Not by the hair of thy chinny-chin-chin!'" ⁹The devil was angry and called a warning. "If you do not let me in this house, little pig, I will conjure a plague of wind and tear down this haven!" ¹⁰And the devil did huff, and the devil did puff, and he blew down the house of Karrash. ¹¹Karrash ran, but his sloth and weight kept him from escaping. ¹²The Lord took pity on Karrash and allowed him to escape his enemy. ¹³He ran to his brother Meridikai and Meridikai accepted his brother into his house and they spent the night eating, drinking, and calling upon a flock of Jewish prostitutes.

3.

¹At dawn the next day, the devil, in the form of a wolf, approached the house of Meridikai and called to the brothers saying, "Little pigs, Little pigs, let me in!" ²Meridikai then answered, "He who approachth this house in the name of God may enter, but he who opposeth the Lord shalt enter thy Lord's judgment quickly!" ³The devil then said unto them, "Little pigs, little pigs, let me in!" The brothers, calling upon the honor of their father, said unto the devil, "Not by the hair of thine chinny-chin-chin!" ⁴And the devil did huff, and the devil did puff, and released a strong gale upon the house. ⁵Being built only of sand and mustard seeds, the haven easily succumbed to the plague of wind. ⁶Karrash and Meridikai escaped through the brush weeds of the fields of Zeredah, close to the coastline of Beb which was governed by the daughter of Josaphat in the land of Job

near the Valley of Poopalacka and went to the house of their brother, Solomon.

4.

¹At dawn the next day, Meridikai and Karrash came to the house of Solomon, and Solomon accepted his brothers from their strife, and gave them food and swine wine. ²After their supper, they met and prayed to God, "O Lord, protect us pigs, your servants, from our enemy." ³And they spent the night praying around the holy Oink of the Covenant.

⁴At noon the next day, the Devil in the form of a wolf came to the house of Solomon saying, "Little Pigs, Little Pigs, let me in!" ⁵Solomon called to the devil, "You will not penetrate this house of Bacon, for it is the will of God that our people will survive from our plague! ⁶Begone enemy! " ⁷Without warning, the devil released a horrible storm of breath, but the walls remained strong. ⁸Again the devil blew, but the house, protected by the Lord, stayed strong in its foundation. ⁹The devil did blow for forty days and the devil did blow for forty nights and released many threats of famine and pestilence upon their livestock and frankincense and grains and checkered robes and pigskins, ¹⁰but the walls of the house of Bacon did not tremble.

¹¹Then the devil did catch in his eye a chimney large enough to encompass his girth. ¹²Using the wolf's body, he jumped up to the chimney with great agility.

¹³The pigs held up the Oink of the Covenant and prayed to God asking for protection against their invader. ¹⁴Just then, Meridikai did stumble upon a chair leg, and dropped the Oink of the covenant upon the gas lever of the fireplace and flames grew within the fireplace and the devil was consumed by the fire and his ashes lay dormant upon the hearth.

¹⁵And the pigs did rejoice and praised God for their protection and the lands became greatly populated with their sons and daughters. ¹⁶And the Lord blessed the latter days of Solomon and Meridikai and Karrash and each they died an old man and each was full of days, and they were feasted upon by those who came after them in a great fire. ¹⁷And the Lord said unto the people, "You will call this feast Barbecue, and you will celebrate it each year on this day, the last Sabbath of January, in reverence of me, and make pigskins to play games in great congregation and feast upon these ribs and rinds and sandwiches and grilled meat and strips of Bacon to cover leavened hamburgers and keep it holy."

YOUTH TO BE PROUD OF

by Nicole Cushing

REVIEW OF THE RILEY HIGH SCHOOL LITTLE THEATER GROUP'S FRIDAY NIGHT PERFORMANCE OF *OUR TOWN* by Narvin Glasgow

If this is the best our children can give us, then our children's children are doomed.

Even when compared only to other student productions, Friday's performance of *Our Town* left quite a lot to be desired. A student director – Natasha Ogdon (daughter of Riley Funeral Home owner Oscar Ogdon) – perverted Thornton Wilder's masterpiece with the use of various special effect bells and whistles which the Director's Notes indicated were intended to make the play more relevant in the era of text messages and Twitter.

Originally supposed to take place nearly a century ago, Ogdon set the play in the time span between the late 1970s and the mid-'90s, and dressed her cast up in white leisure suits, gauzy Stevie Nicks-style dresses, and cords of corduroy. In scenes where there is a death or (SPOILER) where the dead speak, she had that character climb a stepladder and spin a suspended disco ball ("to symbolize the shining brilliance of each and every soul," her notes said). She then had a squad of stage mothers hoist the actors into the air using a system of pulleys and very thin stage wire. "That way the audience knows they're in heaven," the notes explained.

As if this wasn't horrendous enough, pandemonium broke out during intermission. The actress playing Young Emily (Meghan McElroy, daughter of Buddy's Pharmacy owner and operator Buddy McElroy) wriggled past the closed curtain, burst onto the gymnasium stage, and announced to a store-brand-soda-sipping, no-bake-cookie-nibbling audience that a pee test had just confirmed her pregnancy.

The few students who bothered attending (all weirdos – boys wearing eyeliner, girls decked out in combat boots) failed to restrain their laughter at this ill-timed disclosure. But a fair number of the farmers, bikers, waitresses, and hospital maids in the gymnasium that night assumed the speech was part of the show, and had no clue Ms. McElroy was breaking character. This changed when she hollered how she suspected Mr. Richardson, the sensitive – and honestly, hitherto-assumed-homosexual – guidance counselor, to be the father. A close review of the program verified there was no presumably gay school guidance counselor in *Our Town*, let alone one who meandered across boundaries with enough gall to impregnate a student.

And speaking of homosexuality, when Meaghan McElroy spilled the beans about her pregnancy, Todd Blankenship (son of Superior Court Judge Howard Blankenship) and

Joey Bancroft (son of Grace Presbyterian Church's junior pastor Craig Bancroft) – both youths of fifteen – began tongue-kissing each other right next to her. In between slobbering gasps, they announced their undying love and threatened to elope to Iowa City.

At that point Luke Emerson (son of Riley's only private practice psychotherapist, Emerson Emerson, Ph.D.) walked up next to Young Mr. Blankenship and Young Mr. Bancroft and explained to the audience that he'd long been an aficionado of self-mutilation. He then removed his shirt to reveal a torso criss-crossed with scars and a cavity of crusty muscle where his belly button should have been. He screamed he had eradicated his navel in an attempt to erase every trace of evidence that a connection ever existed between himself and his "controlling (expletive)-mother."

Emerson Emerson reportedly expressed relief afterward that his son "at least wasn't like those two kissing boys."

It took some time for Ms. Ogden to settle down her charges and get the second act going. But the damage proved irreparable. The special effects (that is to say, the pulleys and the wire) did their job well enough, allowing the "actors" (a term I use loosely for this gaggle of maladjusted youth) to float in mid-air, inducing a sense of crude wonder. Director Ogden deserves the mildest of kudos for at least making sure the machinery worked well-enough. And her inclusion of musical effects – such as how the first bar of "Thus Spake Zarathustra" played whenever a character died and began levitating off the stage – kept things interesting.

But even that success was not enough to overcome the deficits of the actors, and their transformation of a classic piece of American stagecraft into a tawdry confessional. The only "drama" in Riley High School's production of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* was of the trite, histrionic rumor-mill variety. There is no place for this sort of thing on the Riley High School gymnasium stage.

This production is pollution.

I call on all Rileyite parents to come together and take a stand against this onrush of oddity. I call for our youth to once again be guided by the wise steering of their elders.

I call for consequences: immediate and severe.

RILEY REBOUNDS FOR SATURDAY PERFORMANCE OF *OUR TOWN*

by Narvin Glasgow

Like many of our readers, I have heard the rumors of rampant drug use on the set of Riley High School's production of *Our Town*. How else can one explain how things fell apart, how the center would not hold? Fortunately, our own Riley Police Department has apprehended nineteen-year-old Maxwell McElroy (see page A1, "Pharmacist's Son Nabbed for Pill-Pushing"). Authorities arrested McElroy-the-younger for distribution of unprescribed Xanax and Oxycontin to the rest of the *Our Town* cast. An initial hearing before Superior Court Judge Howard Blankenship has been scheduled, and a cash-only bond set at \$10,000.

Perhaps Young Mr. McElroy only pushed the pills in an innocent attempt to "mellow the troupe out" (as my own daughter, Katie, a box office volunteer and *in no way involved in Friday night's scandal*, informed this journalist Saturday morning). If that were the case, Max McElroy should be informed that by Saturday night the cast apparently lost their case of stage fright without pharmaceutical assistance and pulled off a sensational – one might even say thought-provoking – performance.

If the Tonys gave out awards at the high school level and one of the categories was "most improved performance," I'd be the first to nominate Riley High's production of *Our Town*.

For starters, the play suffered none of the embarrassing, character-breaking confessions which marked Friday's show. One had the sense the actors felt dutifully ashamed of their missteps. They were, in fact, as quiet as cornstalks throughout the entire evening.

This was to be a night at the theater like none ever seen. Even before the performance, one had the sense that the evening held a certain...gravity. A low, musky, sweet-sick scent permeated the air. As Riley's most influential critic of the arts, I have to admit that I am catered to and spoiled by venues who reserve a seat in the front row for me. However, at this performance I discovered no reservation was necessary as the chairs in the Riley High gymnasium were devoid of parents. The only other audience members were a handful of young people – the most garish and awkward of the proto-freaks who attended the show the night before. They sat in the back of the gym, snickering and whispering to each other as I walked past them. I paid the ruffians no mind and placed my camera and notepad in the empty seat next to me, settling in for what I assumed would be another long evening.

As with Friday's show, pulleys and stage wire were an integral part of the production. Even more so Saturday than Friday, come to think of it. As noted in my previous review, there were moments Friday night when the actors moved about freely by foot. On Saturday, however, the pulleys animated the cast throughout the entire performance.

Wheels squeaked overhead, and the wire lifted the youths to just the right height so their legs seemed to gallop across the stage. The actors were at ease with the arrangement, and I could not detect any sign of discomfort, even when the pulleys sometimes jerked to and fro with a bit too much force.

Given the actors' Friday night debauchery, it makes sense that they appeared not-quite-themselves on Saturday. One couldn't put one's finger on it. They looked more pale and waxen than when I'd last seen them. Riley Funeral Home make-up artist Sarah Ogden (noted in the program as a last-minute addition to the crew) did a splendid job though. The youth had none of the untamed nastiness that had been on outrageous display Friday night. They looked, in fact, rather at peace. As though they were all in a better place now, both mentally and morally.

The lips of the actors did not move, but I could hear lines of dialogue nonetheless. They were bellowed by voices residing in the rafters above the stage. The voices were not those of the teens, but instead a more haggard – some might say, more mature – echo of those voices. Older voices, but similar enough to the youth themselves. More skillful voices, delivering the dialogue in a far more snappy, even melodic, fashion when compared to the stammering and giggles on Friday.

There was no sign of the corduroy, the leisure suits, or the nipple-suggesting gauzy dresses that had embarrassed the entire town of Riley on opening night. Each youth wore classic black. The boys wore black suits adorned with a white carnation, white shirts, and black neckties. The girls wore calf-length black dresses, adorned with a white bow at the neckline and a white carnation pinned to the chest.

There was no sign of the disco ball. But there were flowers in many places, and a guestbook had been set next to the box office. There was no more "Thus Spake Zarathustra." Instead, old Ma Ogden sat at an organ I'd never noticed in the gymnasium before. At the end of each scene she played a few bars of "Amazing Grace." I don't know about you, but *this* Rileyite will take "Amazing Grace" over "Thus Spake Zarathustra" any day of the week.

Whereas those in attendance on Friday night said that the allegedly "dead" characters could be seen flinching – even smirking – I could not observe even a stray breath among that very same cast on Saturday.

I found myself moved as the Riley High Little Theater Group had never moved me before. At performance's end, one of the ushers (I think Zeke Ogden) must have noticed the tear rolling down my cheek. He offered me a tissue, and I gratefully accepted.

While momentarily distracted I took the opportunity to glance back at the other members of the audience seated in the rear, to see if they shared my appreciation for the Little

Theater Group's 180 degree turn.

It seems as though they were at least as moved as I'd been, if not moreso. Even in the dimly lit theater, I could see them lurched over, shaking and sobbing. They must have felt self-conscious (they looked more nervous than a cat in a room full of rocking chairs). As soon as they became aware of my backward glance they made a bee-line for the exit.

The premature departure of so many audience members created some awkwardness, but at least there was none of the nonsense from Friday's performance – none of the missed cues or sloppy costume-changes. Only cold precision.

At the show's end, the curtain fell. Modest to a fault – and perhaps gun-shy about breaking character as they had on Friday – the cast did not take a bow. Theater veterans may find this to be the one inexcusable breach of etiquette, but I found this new-found reserve a welcome change. There was none of the unscripted chaos in Saturday's performance. There was only *Our Town*.

After the show concluded and the last note of "Amazing Grace" played, I asked Ma Ogden if I could have a word with her granddaughter, Natasha. I wanted to know how she'd pulled off (literally overnight) such a swift revision in so many areas of production.

She paused for a second and looked embarrassed. But when she realized I wasn't going to let the matter drop, she looked up to me and smiled. "The difference, Mr. Glasgow, is prayer. You can go back and see her, but I wouldn't expect her to be too talkative. She's still praying. We convinced Natasha to pray long and hard about what she'd done last night, about letting all those unspeakable things be said and making a nice student play all weird. After some time speaking to the Man Upstairs she accepted our suggestions without talking back."

I went backstage and verified this was, indeed, the case. In the green room, Natasha Ogden wore the same black clothing the actors had. She knelt rigidly on the floor with a tattered family Bible resting on a chair in front of her. She looked expressionless – like she'd somehow fallen asleep in that posture – so I called out her name. I tried, oh, I don't know, three or four times with no response. I can only reason that she was in deep contemplation of the scriptures. Her eyes looked shut so tight, as though they'd been sewn shut. If only all of us could remain that focused on God's word, the world would be a better place. This Rileyite rests assured our community will stay in good hands.

Yes, if Saturday's show is any indication, Riley can look forward to quite the bright future. One day made all the difference, it seems. On Friday, the cast was the most undisciplined array of fringe freaks our town could ever assemble. But by Saturday, they were youth to be proud of.

A REVIEW OF D. HARLAN WILSON'S *PECKINPAH*
(Shroud Publishing, 2009)
by Garrett Cook

People have gotta stop writing the best damn bizarro book I've ever read. I'm going to look like some kind of asshole. First one that did it was D. Harlan Wilson. Maybe it was the first bizarro book I ever read, but it was the best for awhile. Then came Andersen Prunty's *Zerostrata* and Eckhard Gerdes' *My Landlady the Lobotomist*. Best damn bizarro books I ever read.

So here I am looking over a PDF of D. Harlan Wilson's *Peckinpah*. I heard him read from it a couple months ago when we read together in Chicago and I thought it was really something. Might be cool to read the whole thing. First chance I get, I read the whole thing.

Alan Moore says it's a "bludgeoning celluloid rush of language, etc., etc." Damn good blurb from the man who reinvented comics. Makes the review seem like a waste of time. Made me perversely hope this wasn't the best damn bizarro book I'd ever read. What would be the point?

The book begins by making banality into poetry. Tumbleweeds roll past his sentences. Smells like gas stations, barbecue, and old people. *Last Picture Show*. *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Yet he doesn't make that mistake John Gardner tells everyone to avoid: describing boring things by being boring. Wilson's writing is animated by energy. Negative energy, but energy nonetheless.

Then a stranger comes to town, in the tradition of the eponymous director, in the tradition of grit and gunpowder and sawdust from which this book is born. It is wry, it is loving, it is gory, it is archetypal, it is fun, it is sad. It is Peckinpah, it is Hooper, it is Lansdale, it is Texas, it is magic. Then it is Joycean, metafictional madness, deep explorations of violence. It's a meditation on perception like a Wallace Stevens poem, but it's thirteen ways of looking not at a blackbird, but at the vultures that peck out your fucking eyeballs.

It is the best damn bizarro book I've ever read. Might be the best one you've read. God damn you, D. Harlan Wilson, damn your sawdust, grit, and genius. I tip my dusty po-mo cowboy hat to you.

**A REVIEW OF L.V. RAUTENBAUMGRABNER'S
AS I WAS CUTTING AND OTHER NASTINESSES
(New Pulp Press, 2010)
by Garrett Cook**

Mr. Hanscomb opened the Media Mail envelope, eyes full of perverse pleasure. He had masturbated himself to satisfaction, finished his third boilermaker, and now held in his hand a slick, new paperback from New Pulp Press. *As I Was Cutting and Other Nastinesses*. Damn good title. He turned it over. Chris Genoa. D. Harlan Wilson. Some of the biggest fish in the bizarro tank at the aquarium were blowin' some great big bubbles about this shit. He went inside, rolled his dead wife off the couch, and began to read. He made another boilermaker, laughed the whiskey out his nose, thought long and hard about this new frontier in American fiction, and dreamed his eighth grade math teacher was giving him a barbed wire handjob.

My experience was not unlike Hanscomb's. I got the book in the mail and I was impressed. While drawn together by a neo-pulp aesthetic, *As I Was Cutting's* stories show Rautenbaumgrabner to have a wide interpretation of the genre and to prioritize the emotional truth of his work over loyalty to anybody's understanding of what "pulp" is. The stories in *As I Was Cutting* range from the whimsically sick ("Blaps Mortisaga") to the outright tragic ("Old Movies") to the Carverian and very human ("A Mind Excessively Deferential to Received Ideas"). Rautenbaumgrabner proves to be an author capable of taking his work to real extremes, but not necessarily obligated to do so. *As I Was Cutting* is dirty, compelling, powerful stuff, and I can't wait to see what else New Pulp Press and Rautenbaumgrabner have to offer.

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Brandi Wells has a BA in Creative Writing and her fiction appears in or is forthcoming in *elimae*, *Pear Noir*, *Monkey Bicycle*, *Word Riot*, and *Vulcan*. She has a chapbook forthcoming as part of the chapbook collective, *Fox Force 5*, which is being released by Paper Hero Press. She blogs at brandiwells.blogspot.com.

Famous Author Mykle Hansen is frequently described as “brilliant,” “hilarious,” “weird,” “crazy,” “insane” and “stalking me.” He is the author of the short-story collection, *Eyeheart Everything*, the tragicomic novel, *Help! A Bear is Eating Me!*, the novella collection, *Rampaging Fuckers of Everything on the Crazy Shitting Planet of the Vomit Atmosphere*, and the upcoming blockbuster, *My Publisher Says I’m Doing Really Well with Extremely Long and Ungainly Book Titles So Here’s Another One*. He is a noted exponent of the bizarro movement in literature, film and, personal hygiene. He is also a musician, carpenter, computer programmer, sculptor, tap dancer, bicyclist, martial artist, ordained minister, and firm block of lightly deep-fried tofu. Mr. Hansen resides with his family and friends within a magic bubble called Portland, Oregon, where everybody drinks coffee and rides bicycles and nothing bad ever happens.

Gabe Durham lives in Northampton, MA. His stories have appeared or are forthcoming in *Hobart*, *Fourteen Hills*, *Mid-American Review*, *Pequin*, *Johnny America*, *Word Riot*, *NOÖ Journal*, and elsewhere.

Garrett Cook is the winner of the first annual Ultimate Bizarro Showdown and ignominious loser of the second. He works hard for the money but not too hard, still you’d better treat him right. He is a writer of bizarro, horror and neo-pulp fiction. It’s a steady job but he wants to be a paperback writer. Which is what he is and it is not a steady job. He is the author of *Murderland part 1:h8*, *Murderland 2: Life During Wartime*, and *Archelon Ranch*. He’s a ghost, he’s a god, he’s a man, he’s a guru. His book, *Jimmy Plush, Teddy Bear Detective*, is coming soon from Eraserhead Press. He is all out of limited edition preorders of this book. You snoozed and lost, motherfuckers. Also, he is a critic for *Withersin* and edits magazines or some shit.

Jeff Lawhead is 25 years old.

Kristian Adam has published with *Crow Toes Quarterly* five times. He has been featured on the cover four times and exhibits regularly throughout Vancouver. He also had shows at Black Maria Gallery in Los Angeles in June and at Yaletown Gallery in Vancouver in fall. Kristian did live demonstrations at Word on the Street Vancouver in 2008 and at BC Book and Magazine Week in 2009. Here’s the link to images from the events: www.kristianadam.com/illustration/news.html

Nicole Cushing is a newer writer in the bizarro scene, and also explores the more absurd side of traditional science fiction, fantasy, and horror. Eraserhead Press will publish her first book, *How to Eat Fried Furries*, later this year as part of the New Bizarro Author Series. Her short fiction appears in the most recent issue of the *Journal of Experimental Fiction*, and is slotted to appear in the long-awaited Richard Laymon tribute anthology, *In Laymon's Terms* (Cemetery Dance Publications). Visit Nicole's blog at www.nicolecushing.wordpress.com.

R.E. Greene is an undergraduate student at the University of South Dakota. He has served as the assistant fiction editor for the South Dakota Review. Greene is also an active member of the Vermillion Literary Project (VLP) and produced "Microwave Souls," an album of spoken-word poetry, for the VLP in 2005. This is his first published story.

xTx has been published in places like *Pank*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *Thieves Jargon*, *decomp*, *Dogzplot*, *>Kill Author*, *elimae* and others. She is included in the *Dogzplot Flash Fiction 2009 Anthology* and has an ebook, *Nobody Trusts a Black Magician*, available from nonpress (www.notapunkrockpress.com/titles.html). She says nothing at www.notimetosayit.com.