

Unsolicited Advice for Living in the End Times

Written by Michael Seidenberg & Illustrated by Farr Q. Daufeen

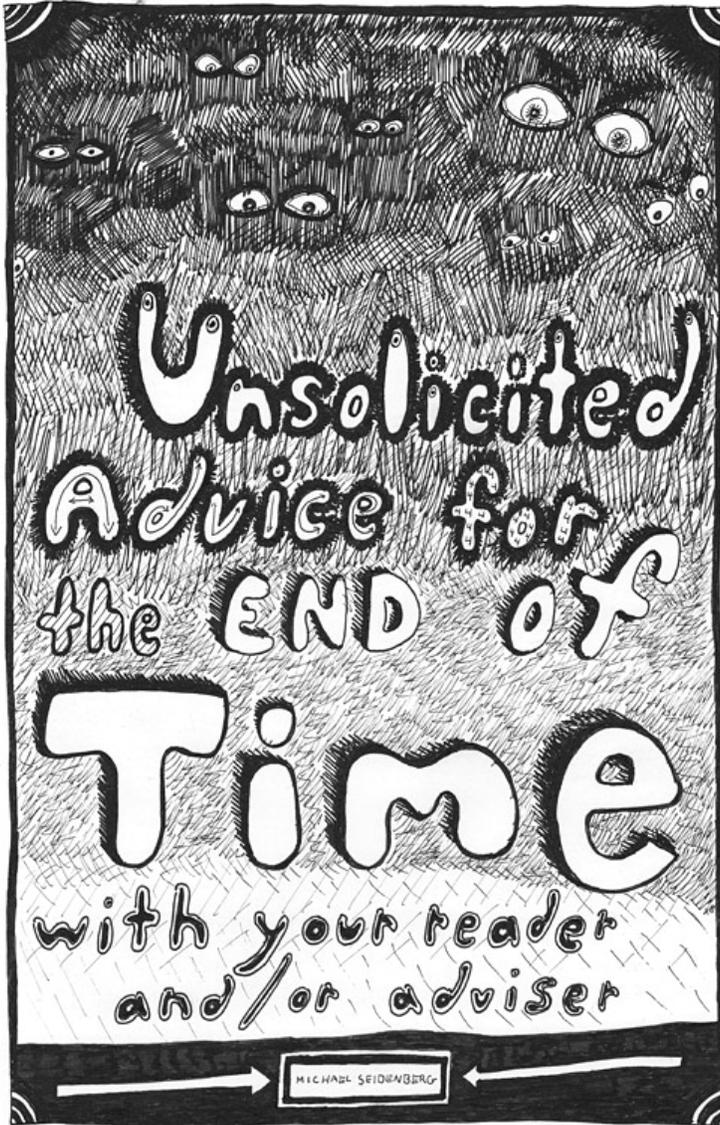
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I only agreed to write this end of times advice column for the obvious reason, the end was near. Now it's been two years and it's still kicking. I would love to say more but I gotta go, I have a deadline for next year's column and time is not going to end on its own.

—Michael



IT'S A NEW year, and the beginning of a second one for this column and the magazine it appears in. We are back. We have returned, and we're very happy to be here. I know what some of you are thinking (don't suppose for a minute that I can't see that internal, gloat-ing smile forming on the lips that live in your brain): "Hey, they're back. What's up with that? Why is that end-of-times guy still yap-ping away instead of eating canned goods in a

bunker somewhere?"

If that little kerfuffle with the Mayan end-of-world fail is on your mind, then it's best we part company right now. Let's not waste any more of my precious time. I don't care what Bob Dylan said; I say *do* think twice—at least twice. This column is not about predicting the future or lack of one but is rather a reading of the present that can help us proceed to the exits in an enjoyable way and at a safe speed. It can be a guide for what to pick up along the road to smooth the way through your last laps, or it can offer hints at what to ditch. As important as it is to go out in style, it's most important to go out in your own style. Be the boss of you.

No matter how great your life is, no one should wind up like that Fass-binder film *Berlin Alexanderplatz*: 15 perfect hours and then poof, it all goes wonky in the last 30 minutes. Trust me: No one wants this. Our egress will define our existence.

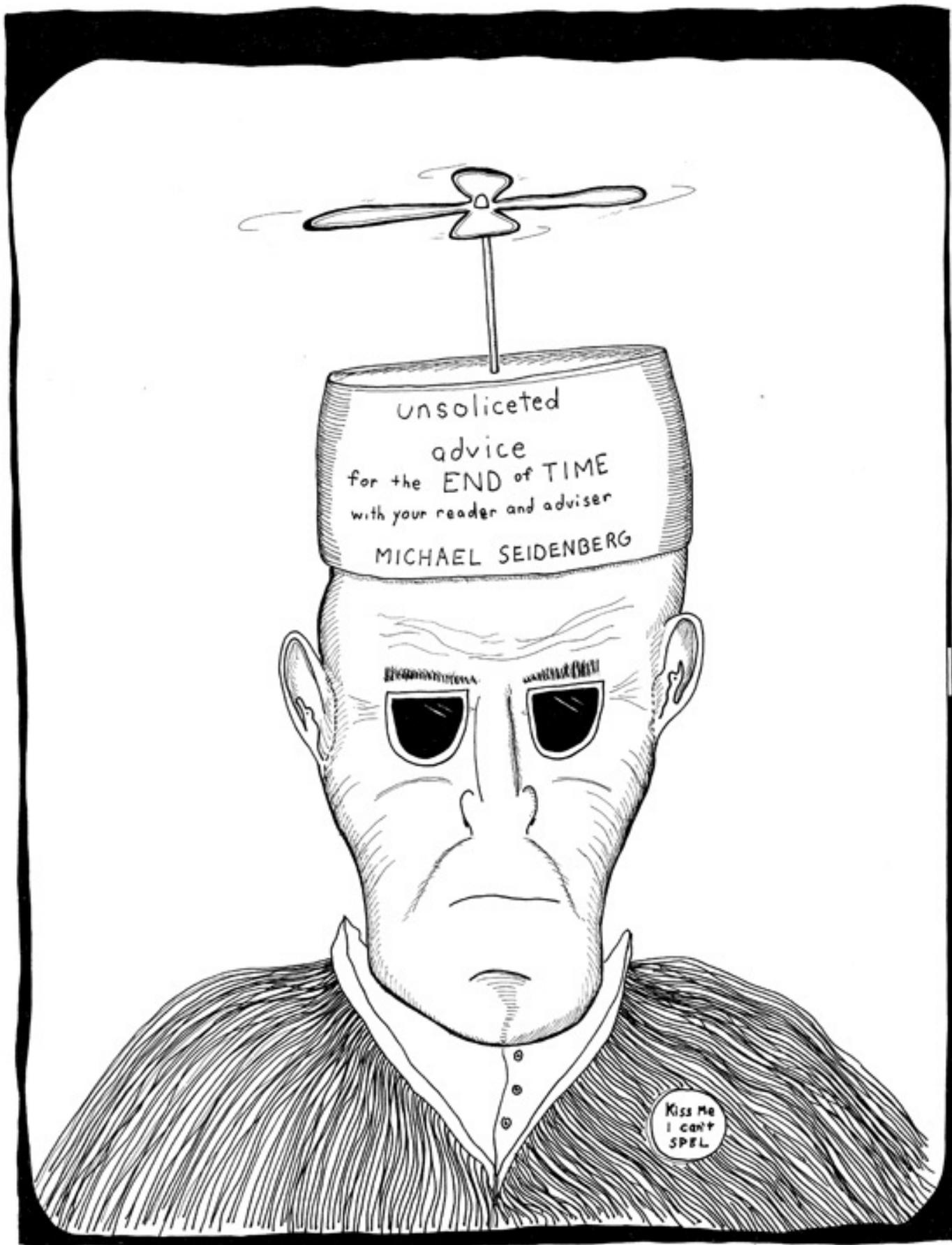
So if you keep reading and take my advice, I can promise you a shot at a peaceful and pleasurable departure. We will make a joyful noise, but in a quiet way. Balance will be our guiding light. It's going to be "a bisssel of this and a bisssel of that" way of life, or if you prefer a different sort of cultural appropriation, think of it as a thoughtful mix of yin and yang. And for all those "my way or the high-way" types, they can think of it as a little bit country, a little bit rock and roll. What I'm try-

ing to say here is that everyone has their own way; the important thing is to be on your way. One thing we need above all is fun. Sounds simple, but fun can be the fuel that drives us where we want to go. In the midst of the many “good times were had by all” periods that you will experience on your fun quests, please try to remember that we still have a future and we will always have a past. We need to keep them, both of them, in the front of our minds and deep in our hearts. If we can make a sweet cocktail of those two parts of ourselves, then I know we’ll be able to fly through the end of times with the greatest of ease. We might even have time for a little philosophy, a bit of cosmic Q & A. Who knows, we might finally get answers to some of the big questions we’ve always had, like “What is the politically correct way to eat a black-and-white cookie?” or “Will there ever be a final season of *Arrested Development*?” But remember, even if none of the puzzles of our life are solved or any of its questions answered, we still need to happily acknowledge having embraced our

doubts and be thankful for the lifeblood that is our curiosity.

So ride with me, friends, through the end times, and I’ll take the top down—that I can guarantee. ■





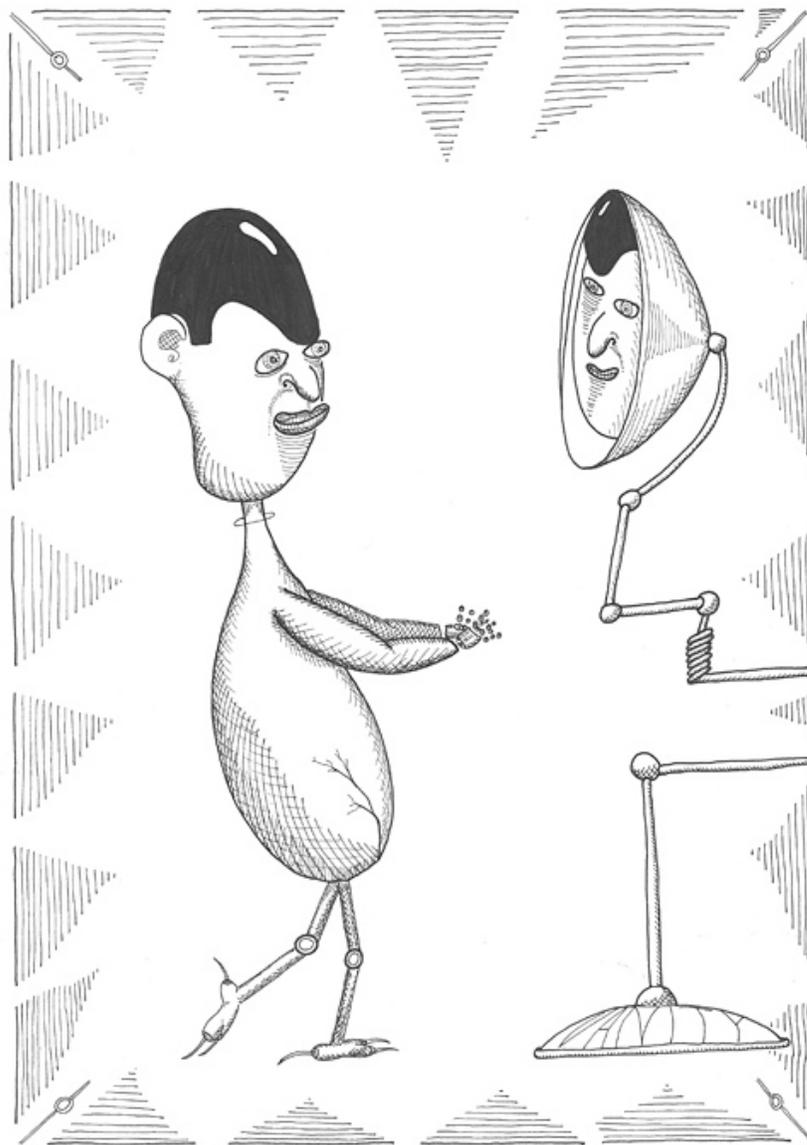
Unsolicited
advice
for the END of TIME
with your reader and adviser
MICHAEL SEIDENBERG

Kiss Me
I can't
SPBL

THERE MIGHT BE a temptation to rush into forming an end-of-times plan, but I would warn against any fast moves. In fact, it might be helpful to think of this upcoming ultimate denouement as a robbery. Your life as you know it is being taken from you, but no one has to get hurt. Remember, any landing you walk away from is a good landing, and that's what all we want and frankly what we deserve. A spirited walk down the landing strip of our lives with no looking over our shoulders.

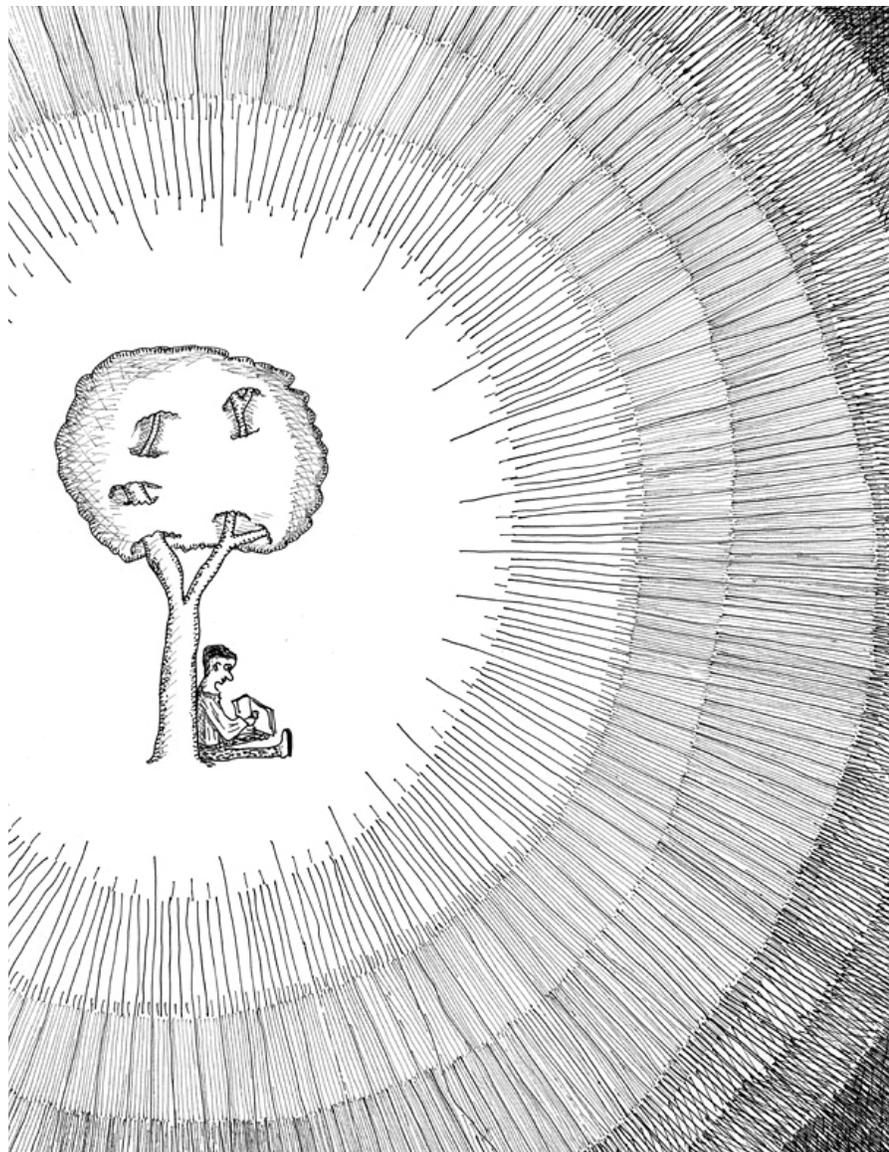
Still no need to speed: Take the time to think, then have a drink and then think some more. Use both sides of your brain. Trust your gut but embrace your inner counterintuitionist and please feel free to use long words that don't exist. You'll thank me never-endingly.

For example, you might feel that with the end looming, we no longer have any need for manners. If this is what you feel, you're wrong. I won't tell you just how wrong because that wouldn't be very polite and we are going to need to maintain a sense of decency toward one another. Believe me, it's gonna be the grease that helps us slide down the pole, and



we're all going down, but that's no reason to get any unnecessary rashes.

We must all attempt to be more social-minded. It's time to think of others. Don't panic: We, of course, can still think of ourselves. It's a bit late for our society to go full-monty selflessness, and I'm certainly not suggesting running off to the Peace Corps or going to China to help the slave laborers make iPhones. It's more like, Stop texting while you're walk-



ing into a pizza shop and then saying “oops” when you walk into a man carrying a pie as you push past him. Sorry, I didn’t want this to get personal, but I think you understand what I mean. It might be time for some rebranding of common decency, make it part of everyday life. At work, manners with your spanners; at play, mores with those s’mores. And not just in the good times: Why not some morals with your quarrels? Okay, all right, just brainstorm-

ing here. Everybody join in; this works better if we’re all on board.

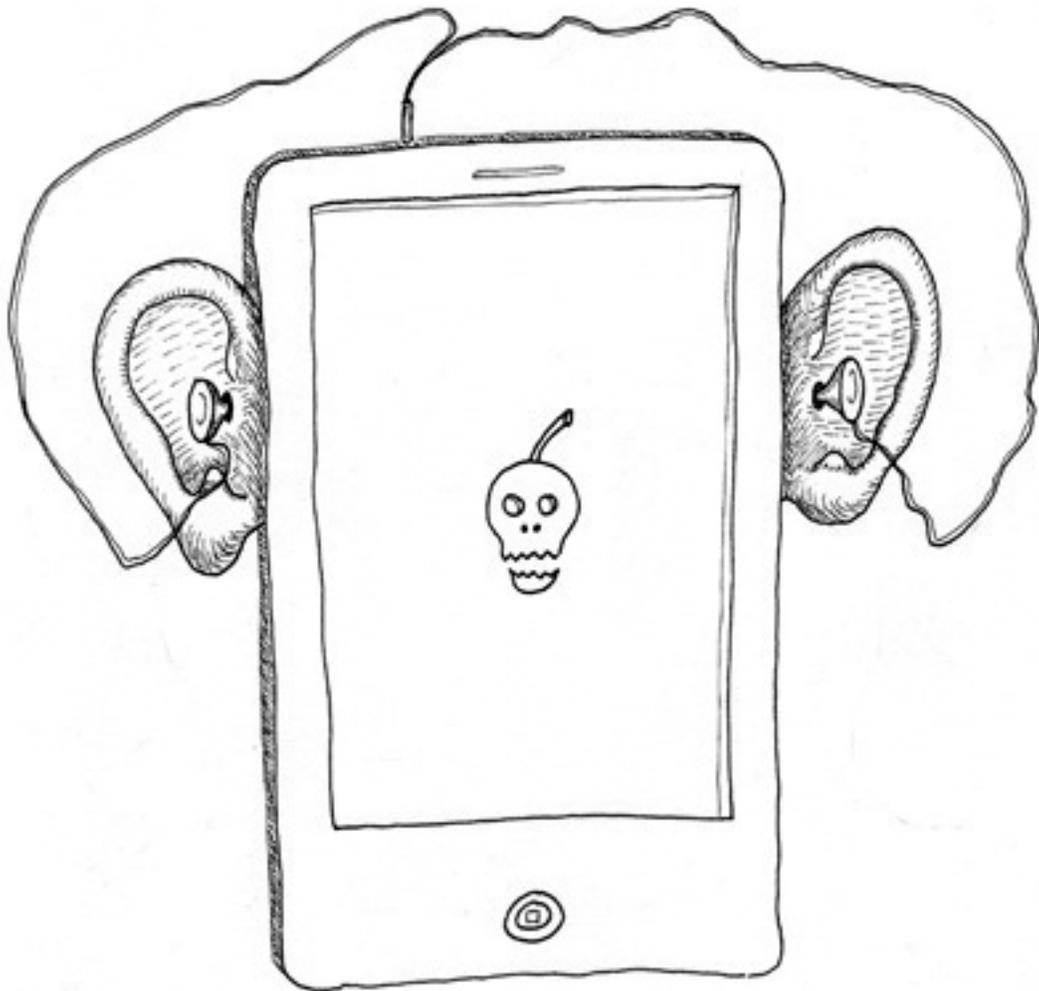
There are small but thoughtful ways to live among others, and that’s what we should strive for. Remember, it shouldn’t be something you feel you must do, but something you are choosing to do. I’ll give another example: At the unveiling of her official portrait, Kate Middleton was asked if she liked it. She said she loved it, which seems highly unlikely. When I saw it, I was instantly reminded of my bar mitzvah portrait, which I hated. Of course, she could have said whatever she wanted. She has, after all, married into the family that used to own England. She was just

being nice, much nicer than I was when I encountered my own badly painted face staring me down. I just hope someday to become a kinder and gentler version of myself. Who knows? Maybe sometime in the future when at a moral impasse, I might just pause and ask myself, “What would Kate do?”

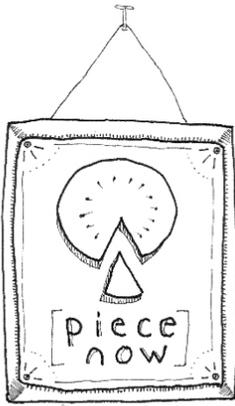
So let me say it again: Try to not rush to judgment and if possible, try not to rush at all.

■

the **END** of **TIME** is HERE



have you noticed?

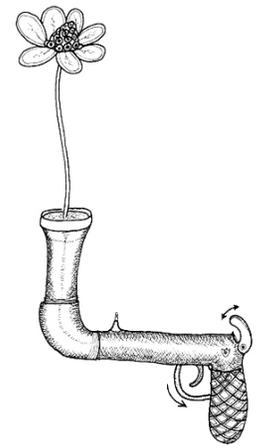


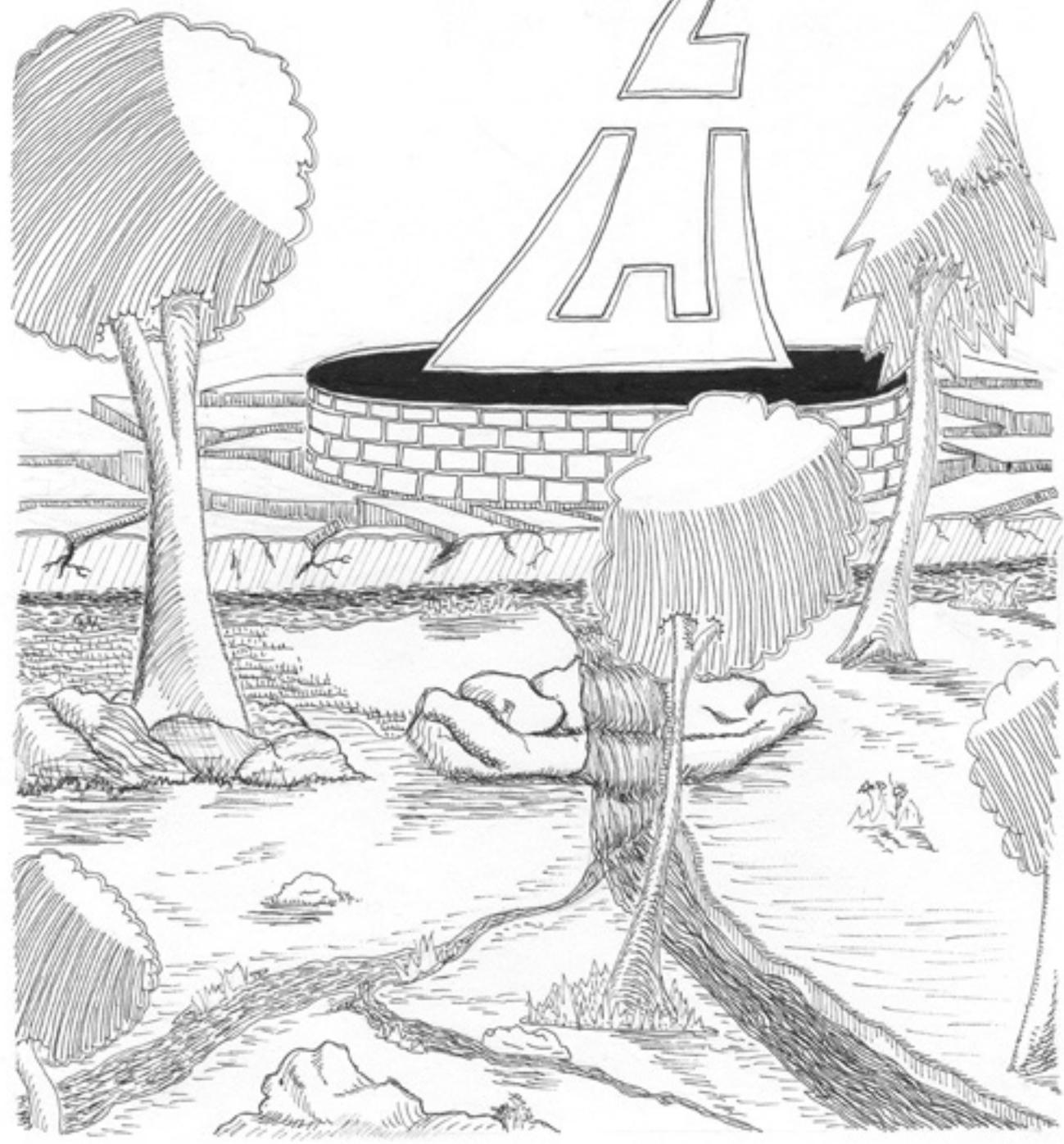
WE ARE TOLD again and again to expect the unexpected. Oscar Wilde says it shows proof of a modern intellect, and Heraclitus goes so far as to say we won't find it if we don't know it's com-

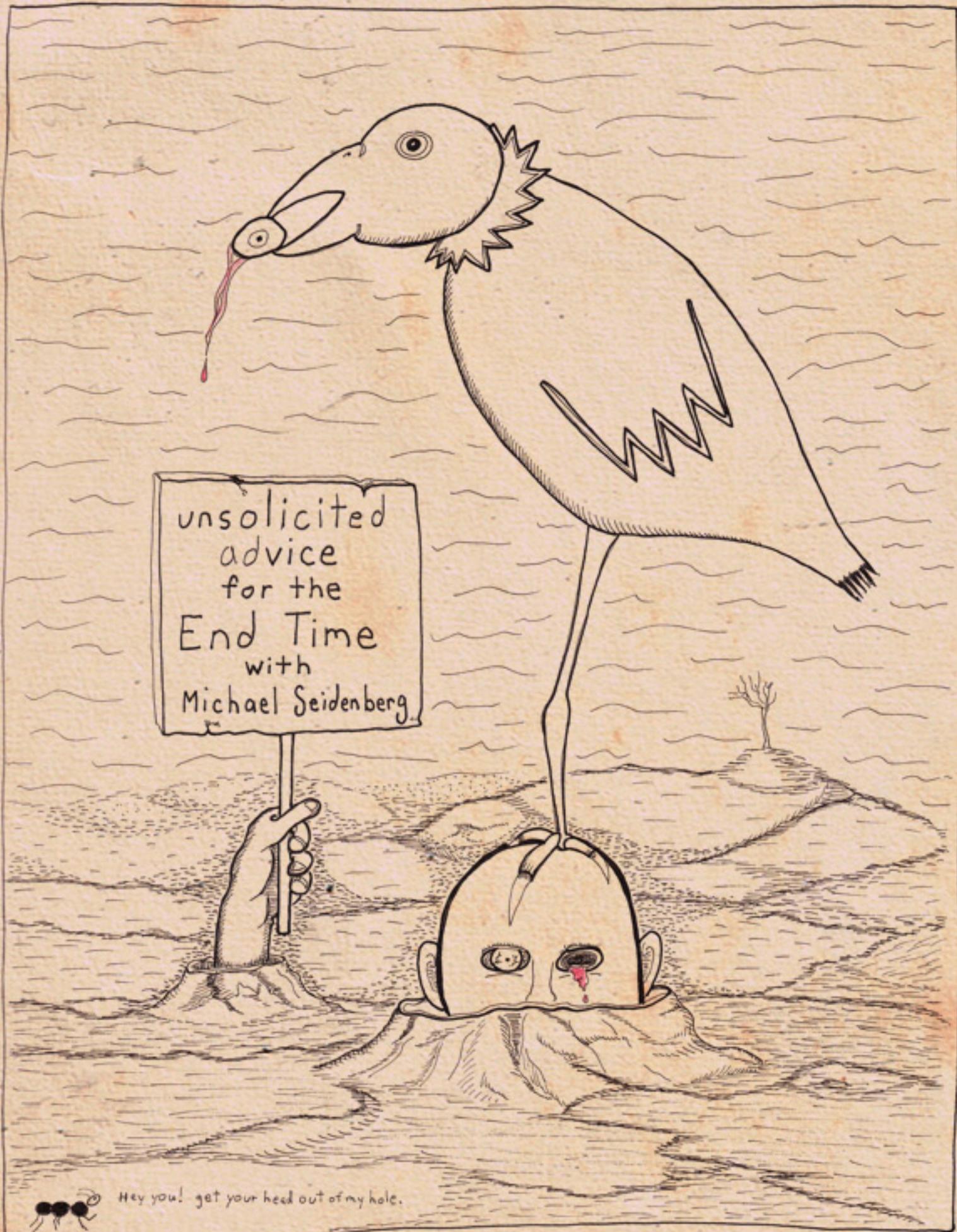
ing. Let me say right now that I love the unexpected and that first-date quality it adds to whatever moment it lands on, but I think it's presumptuous to anticipate the unknown. To attempt to envision the as-yet unseen shows a light arrogance and a general lack of élan, and one thing you don't want is to be approaching the end of time without as much élan as you can rustle up.

Something I wasn't expecting was Ash Wednesday. It always takes me by surprise but not one of the good surprises—rather the re-realization that people are walking the streets of a modern city with ash on their foreheads. I can tolerate religion, just barely, but I get a bit queasy when the hocus pocus and the voodoo parts kick in. Speaking of queasy, let's talk foreskin and the lack of it. Let me say I am down with circumcision. There's nothing like a bit of the old shock of the new to wake a person up to the fullness of life—and everybody knows how I feel about "Less is more." At my nephew's bris I was a sandak, a title of honor given to the person who's job is holding the thighs down while the tip is clipped, so I have been up to see the rabbi suck the evil spirits out of the penis at

hand. Sure, in the spirit of modern times, rabbis now use a Dixie cup when they suck, but it still seems a bit sketchy to me. The modernizing doesn't stop there. A new tradition that has been added to the ceremony is for everyone to greet the child with a quick "*baruch haba*," which doesn't mean "I hope he goes to business school" but rather "blessed be he who comes." They are now expecting the unexpected in the very worst way. They are allowing for the fact that each male child might be the messiah. Not only does this show a serious lack of common sense, it is almost totally élan free. As you can see, this whole concept of expectation and our relationship to the shape of things to come are a lot more complicated than it seems. So again I say, What did you think the end of times was going to look like? Take my advice: Don't expect the unexpected. You don't want to be that guy, the one who knows someone is throwing him a surprise party but just doesn't know where it is. My advice is to go ahead and expect the expected: That's just common sense, which is another thing you will find very useful on the final descent. I say accept the unexpected and embrace the unknown, but don't stop there. Welcome the uninvited and celebrate the non sequitur. You can still think inside the box. You can even live in that box—just remember to open the windows and leave the door unlocked. ■





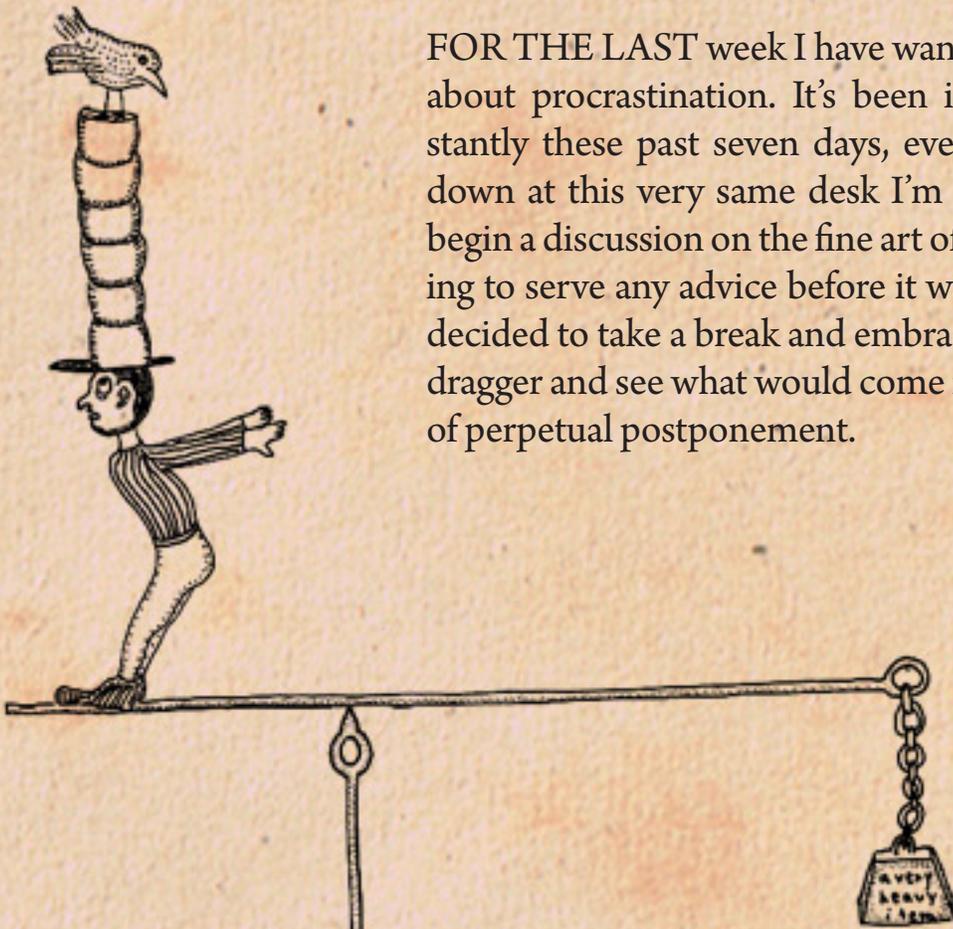


unsolicited
advice
for the
End Time
with
Michael Seidenberg.



Hey you! get your head out of my hole.

FOR THE LAST week I have wanted to talk to you about procrastination. It's been in my head constantly these past seven days, ever since I first sat down at this very same desk I'm sitting at now to begin a discussion on the fine art of delay. Not wanting to serve any advice before it was fully cooked, I decided to take a break and embrace my inner foot-dragger and see what would come from the practice of perpetual postponement.

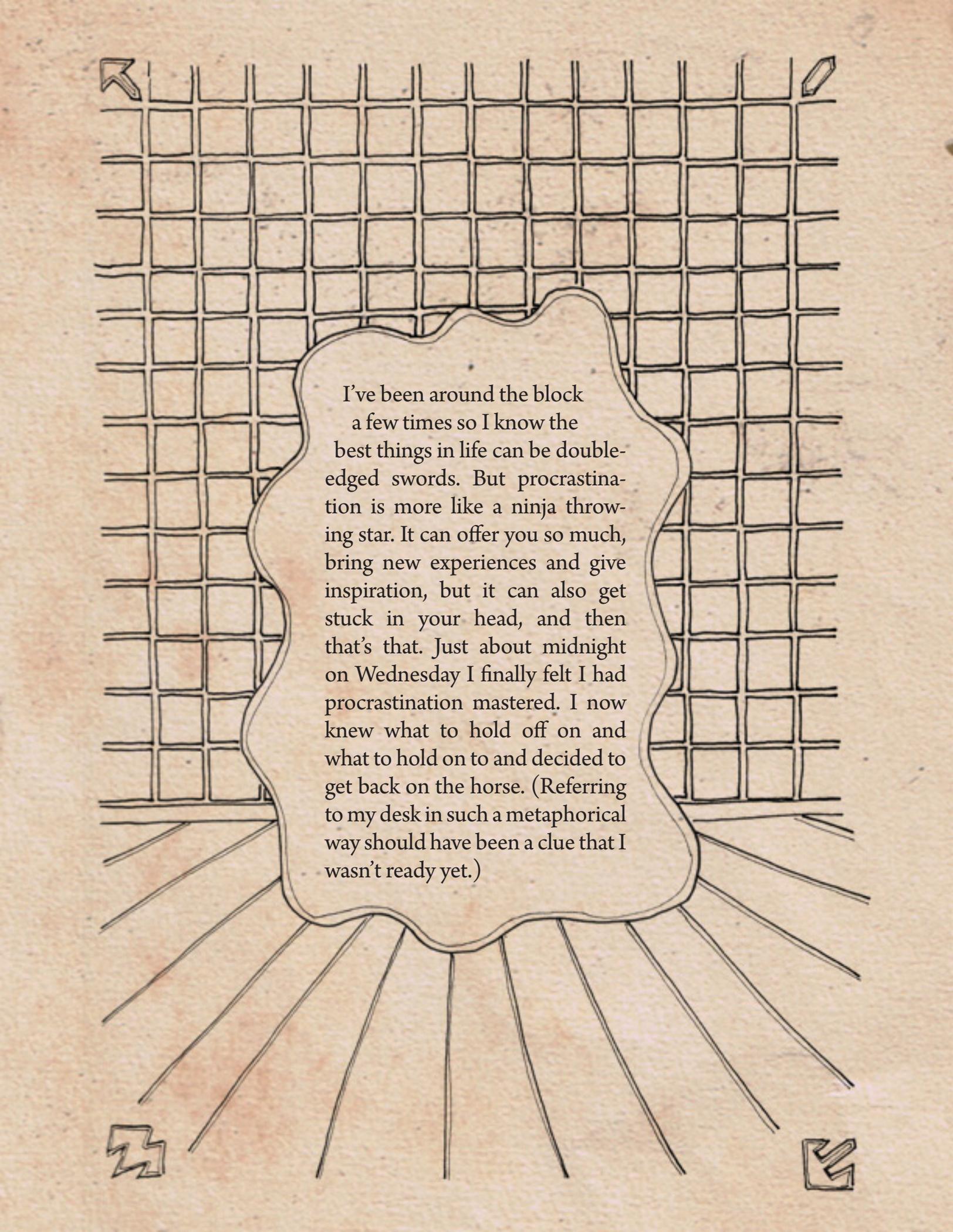


So many fantastic ideas came flowing to me, solutions for old problems and plans for the future. I experienced so many touching moments. Joy abounded. The rewards seemed to be endless, and therein lies the problem — not a problem for me, as I was having a great time. It was you guys I was worried about. If I was going to get this message out before the end of times, I would have to defer from all this deferring.





am I going, where have I been

The page features a grid of squares in the upper half and radiating lines in the lower half. A central cloud-shaped box contains the text. There are four corner icons: a top-left arrow, a top-right pencil, a bottom-left lightning bolt, and a bottom-right arrow.

I've been around the block a few times so I know the best things in life can be double-edged swords. But procrastination is more like a ninja throwing star. It can offer you so much, bring new experiences and give inspiration, but it can also get stuck in your head, and then that's that. Just about midnight on Wednesday I finally felt I had procrastination mastered. I now knew what to hold off on and what to hold on to and decided to get back on the horse. (Referring to my desk in such a metaphorical way should have been a clue that I wasn't ready yet.)

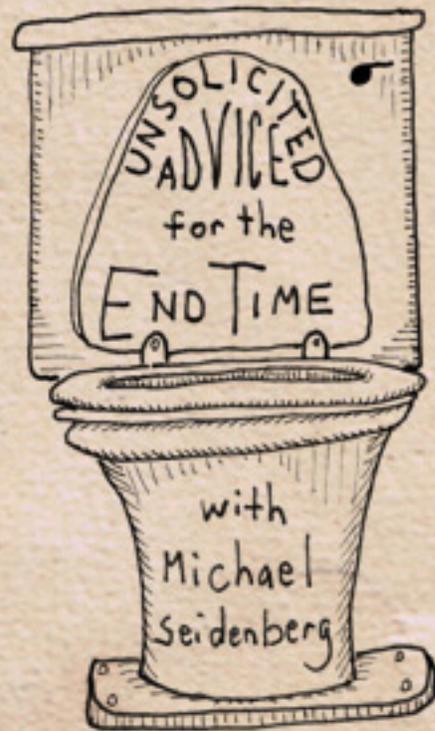
Then I get the call. A writer friend of mine was in town and looking for an afterparty. (And when I say *afterparty*, I mean an afterparty after the afterparty.) He had a roomful of acolytes and hours to stay awake before his plane took off, and I had a column to write, so naturally I agreed to open my bookshop and welcome the brood. I realized immediately that I was still in the grasp of the bitch goddess of the backburner. It was a great night and one I won't soon forget, but I was back in the procrastinating game and hitting it hard. I was putting things off that I hadn't even put on yet, and it was another four days before my desk was again a table and chair and not a metaphor.



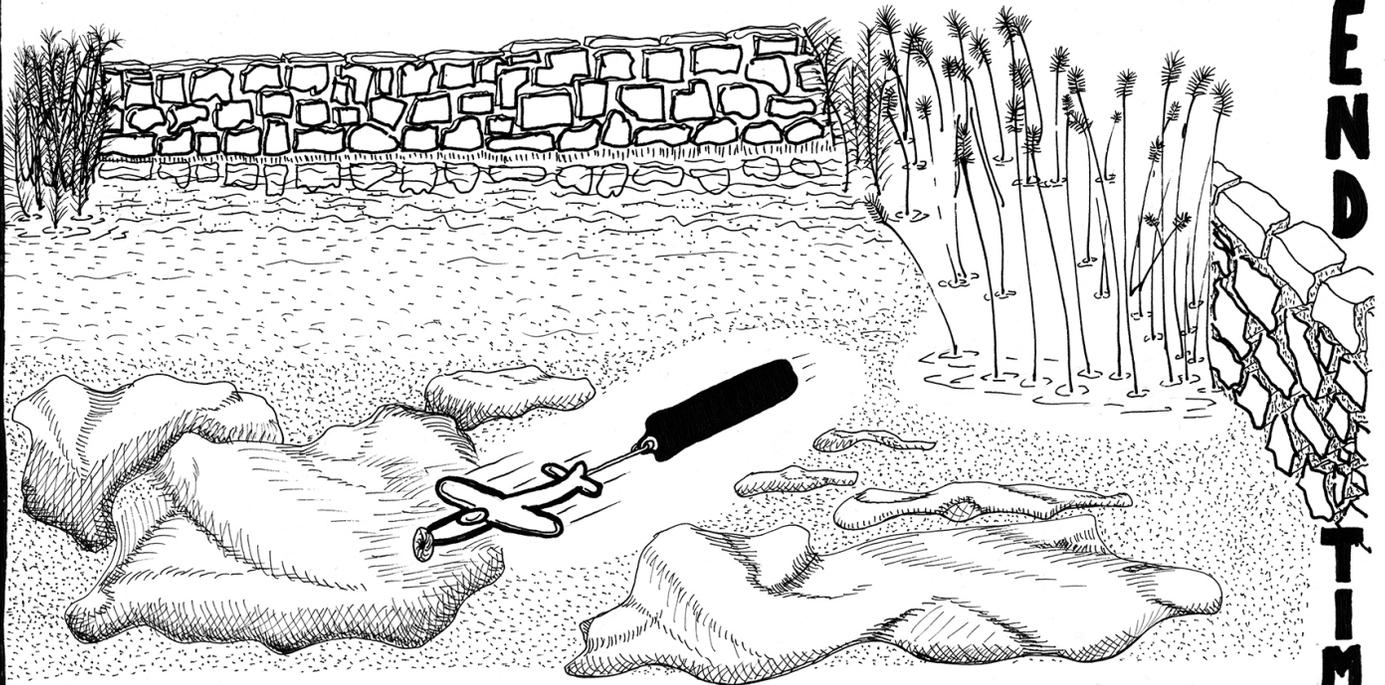
I ask you to see my little saga not only as a cautionary tale but an invitation to compile your own guide to getting the most out of shilly-shallying—it has so much to offer. Dawdle on, brothers and sisters. Don't just mangle but mangle and meditate on all the options that life has to offer, and try not to let the social stigma get to you. There are those that will condemn you. Some will spout about how Freud ties procrastination to the pleasure principle, and others will spew that it is caused by a neurotic impulsiveness. I say to these naysayers that if pleasure is my engine, so be it, and as for neurosis, I propose that just like cholesterol there is good and bad and I'd much rather be impulsive than compulsive.



So here I am, back at the desk. Not that I want you to think my mind isn't in the toilet—it is. I'm currently developing a new method for cleaning the tile grout, and I can't wait to get back to it. ■



UNSOLICITED ADVICE FOR THE



WITH MICHAEL SEIDENBERG

AS WE START to grasp the reality of the upcoming end of times, many of us will feel tempted by a “We Are the World” way of thinking. You might find yourself drawn toward unwarranted sharing, and the next time you’re dining out, you might even notice that you’re opting for a seat at the community table instead of that cozy quiet seat in the corner. What’s next for you if you start making life decisions that will adversely affect your digestion? I strongly advise against falling

into any kind of rainbow-like, all-embracing oneness with the universe, let alone your next-door neighbor.

Sure, if we had unlimited time, I’d say, Let’s organize a few million-man picnics. If there were days to spare, we could dot the planet with a series of mile-long conga lines. I’d be the first to say, Let’s fill every available music studio with every aging rocker and raise money for every crisis we can still create in these final days. As well-intentioned as all

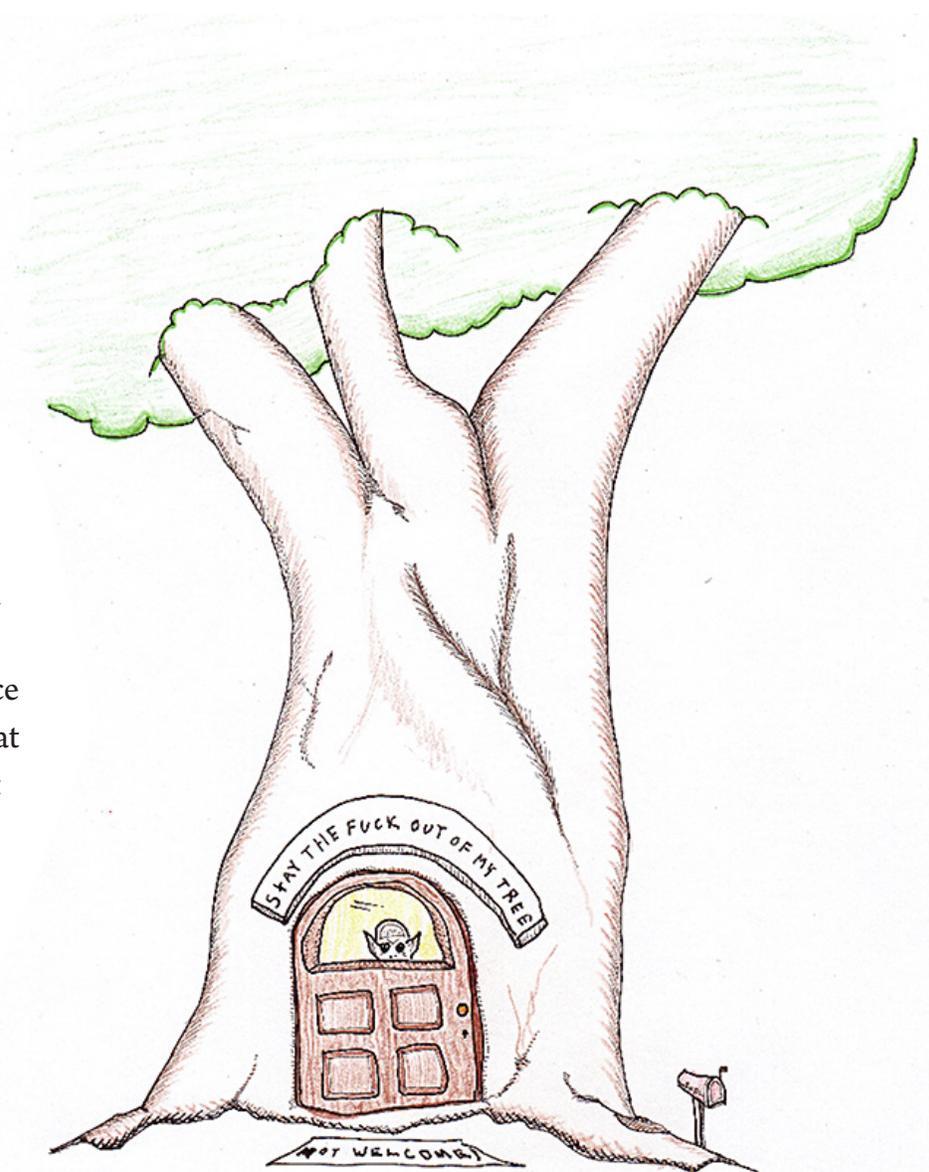
these activities might be, they don't seem the most efficient use of our time as we enter the "gather our rosebuds while we may" time of our existence. I'm not suggesting adopting a mean-spirited, selfish philosophy but rather reminding you that those rosebuds are not going to gather themselves.

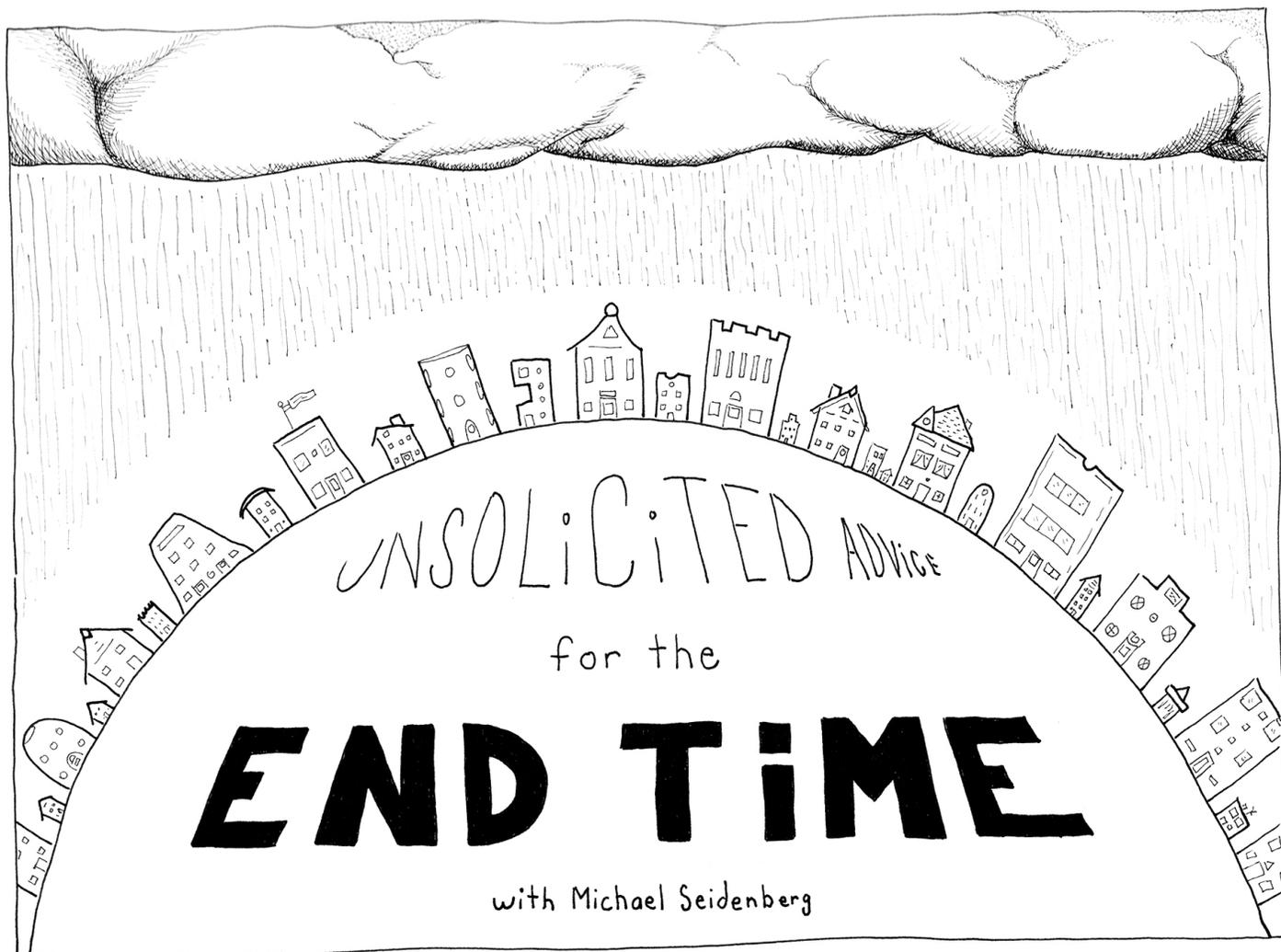
Something that might help us concentrate and focus as we live-stream the coming apocalypse is practicing some healthy separation. I know that people tend to have a bias against walls, but I think we need to switch from thinking of walls as dividers and recognize them as fortifiers. They can be bulwarks against bullshit, barriers that keep away anything that might impede our goals. You might think you don't need any partition protecting you, but let me remind you that as nice as exploding rockets might look you want to be on the other side of the rampart when viewing their red glare.

Back in the day, I was the lone voice asking Mr. Gorbachev to put back that wall. They could at least have taken it down slower or even tried dressing it up a bit: Hang some art, give it a fresh coat of paint. Who knows what a little splash of color and a few trompe l'oeil doorways might have done?

Sometimes you break down barriers by raising

walls. There is no limit to how many can be constructed, and there is no limit to the closeness we can achieve with all this separation. The beauty part is, while we're building all these bridges, we will also be growing our economy. Wall building can be the next growth industry. We can partition our way back to economic health, and I promise you, we will never have to worry about a wall bubble: We can always tear them down and sell the pieces as souvenirs. ■





I WAS HAVING difficulty concentrating lately until I got a delivery from my marijuana provider, who is also a dairy farmer. It was a beautiful sight to behold: three dozen eggs of all sizes and colors. It was time to get down to some serious egg eating, and after five consecutive egg meals I realized I had my focus back. Some of you might think it strange to eat so many consecutive dishes made from the same basic ingredient, but let me tell you: I have seen egg ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion, watched eggs glitter near the Tannhauser Gate ... whoa, it seems that this concentration thing is a little more

complicated than I thought.

As delicious as this ovum fest was, that's not what I want to talk to you about. It's the lesson I learned from letting myself make a long-term commitment to one food. Eggs are large, they contain multitudes. But for our purposes here, they simply make for a very tasty metaphor. It's always been obvious that the more concentration you put into anything, the richer the return, but the trick to the big payoff is going deep. Be consumed as you consume -- love what you put in your mouth and try to put it in as many different ways as you can. We don't want things to just

occupy us, but rather we want to be preoccupied by whatever comes our way. If we let ourselves be smitten, there is much less chance we'll smite. Live your life like this in all your pursuits, allow controlled obsession whenever you can, and you'll have such a great end of times that you'll wish it wasn't going to.

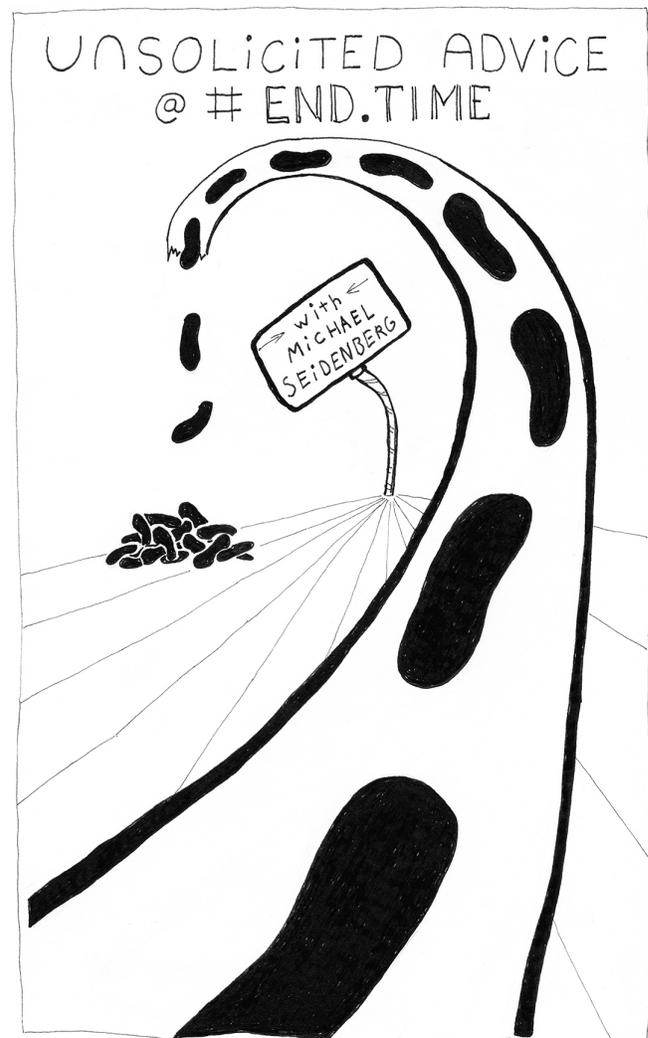
In an era of total overspill of everything, we are vulnerable to building our lives on nothing. As a longtime archivist of books, music, and assorted life ephemera, I can tell you these days I feel like I'm drowning in a sea of opportunities. Did you know that there are five books collecting the wit and wisdom of football coach Joe "Joe Pa" Paterno, and you can access them in three different media forms? As of 4:00 pm today, he has at least six nicknames.

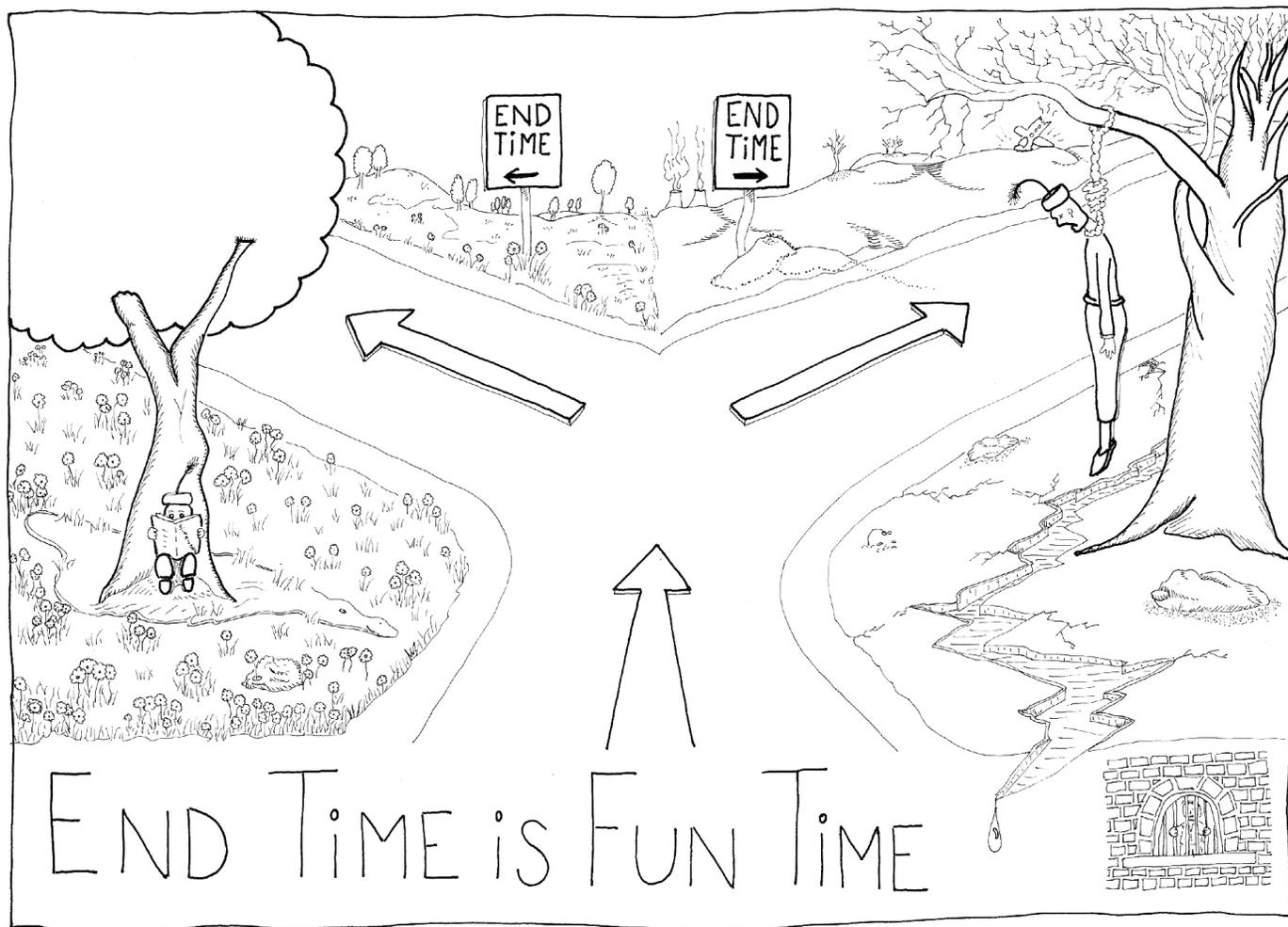
We live in the time of too much information. There is such a din and we all want to be heard. I'm excited when someone tells me I'm an idiot because at least I know they're listening. But more important than the desire to be heard is the need to hear. Our mission in these last days should be the constant search for input. Peak experiences are what we want, but where they are can be a mystery. So keep your mind and all your senses open. The only solution is to focus and fixate, find out what makes you move, then make your move and don't let go.

We want to let the options life offers get a hold on us, but then we must also get a grip on ourselves. Every schoolboy that acquaints himself with the PlayStation nature of his genitals will at least have some sense

of the need for moderation. Life is not all fun and games, but most of the best times are. The time will come, though, when you must achieve that special balance. Hopefully you will experience that epiphanous moment when you finally realize it's your willy, not a wii, that you're playing with. The wisdom just lands in your lap, and it's this wisdom we all need to practice if we want to have the most rewarding end-times experience possible.

All things will be over, but they don't have to be over easy. ■





LATELY I'VE BEEN noticing an insidious efficiency leaking into my days and into my ways and altering my otherwise devil-may-care lifestyle—by which I mean not “heedless of caution” but rather “jovial and rakish in manner.”

The overpowering desire for productivity and the overvaluing of organization in our society enables us to ignore the obvious evils of efficiency. I now find myself cutting corners and opting for the quickest route to my destinations. I'm getting to more places and I'm getting more accomplished, but what am I giving up? I think too much. I worry I'm

losing my linger, no longer taking the time to tarry. I don't see the point of finally getting round to things if I have to lose my dawdle skills.

Being too alert or hyperaware can not only slow you down, but worse, it will limit your possibilities. We need to adopt more of a sleepish attitude to life. There is a reckless and rollicking abandon in our sleep time that we must try and bring into our waking hours. Our minds and our bodies do what they will without constraints when we enter the land of nod, and that is exactly how we want to walk the world till the end of days.

Think of yourself as a sphincter and just try and unclench—life with all its possibilities will surely begin to flow.

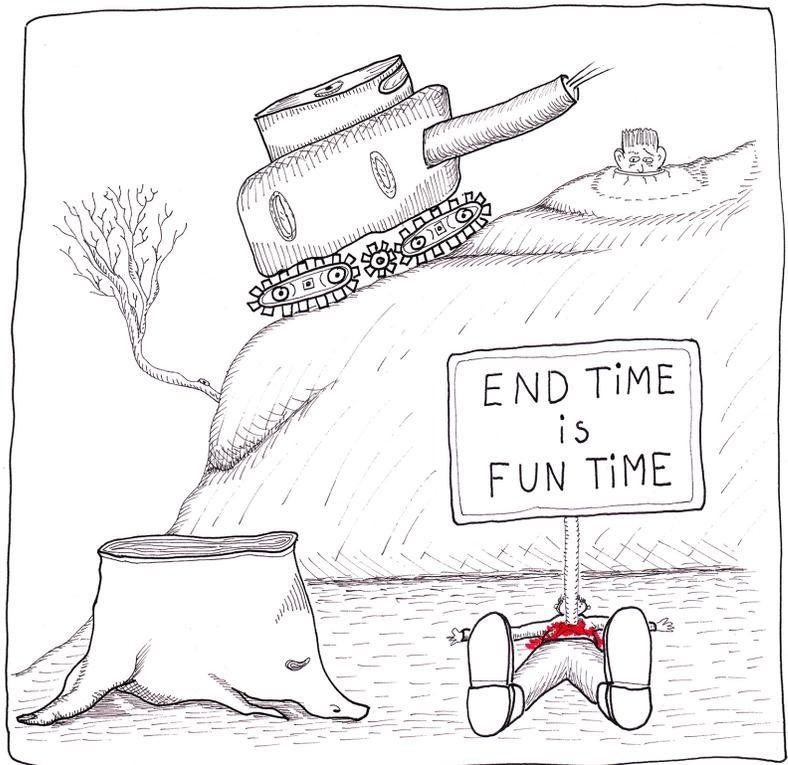
But there is no magic bullet to get you to that special state of vigorous languor that will bring out the best in you. You cannot achieve this state by simply cutting back on your snooze time. Everyone needs their sleep. Let me now remind you of what the great writer Thomas Wolfe's mother said: "You can't make up for lost sleep." So even if you can go home again, you must go right to your old room and have all 40 of your winks.

Along with this creeping competence that has threatened my way of life, I've noticed something else trying to stick itself into my spokes. A sort of misplaced morality is starting to worm its way into my brain. The other night I had what is commonly known as a sex dream. I am not usually a sexual slumberer, but when it does happen, it is always quick and aborted. This night of reverie was different: It involved a free and easy yet protracted night of sex with Rihanna, and I'm happy to say that everyone went home satisfied. After this erotic gift from Morpheus I should have woken up with that cat-who-swallowed-the-canary smile, thinking "the old boy still has it." Instead I'm worried about Chris Brown and what he'll think about it all. The horrible part is that I'm not worried about his hurting me or, worse, hurting her. No, I'm concerned about his getting sad, about his no longer being able to be the

best Chris Brown he can be, and it's all my fault. I don't think I even have to point out that this is bad, bad thinking—bad for me, bad for you and bad for society at large and certainly not worthy of an unsolicited advisor for the end of time or any time.

So I'm pledging to you now to be a better me and stay on the right path through what's left of our time together, and I hope I can help you to find your particular passage. That's the ticket. We all have our own paths, and we need our own maps to find them, and this is one map Google can't help you with.

When you think you don't know right from wrong, trust that you do, and if it turns out you don't, then try and get it right next time. But through it all, you've gotta believe that a little fog will always help clear things up. ■



unsolicited advice for the



End Times



with

MICHAEL SEIDENBERG

TODAY I READ an interview with the founder of the New Inquiry, and during the conversation, my name came up. In a journalistic, if not anthropological, attempt to describe me, I was said to have “a bit of a belly.” I took this description as meaning I had a bit too much of a belly rather than being in possession of only a small part of one. I would venture to guess that in certain societies, my breadbasket might seem somewhat overstuffed, but that’s not the world I live in. When most people see any late-in-life pictures of Orson Welles, they are shocked by his girth, wondering how this great genius could waste his life just getting large and larger. When I come across any images of the portly maestro, I ask,

How did he squeeze so much happiness into one life and then still squeeze in some more?

Just about now you’re probably thinking that I’m choosing to interpret things the way I want to, seeing what I want to see. Well, right you are, but more important, right you will be, if you can learn to personalize your own life story as you live it. I have a vivid dream life that, mixed with my muddled sense of reality, left me no choice but to be in a constant state of do-over. And let me tell you, it works if you work it.

Universal truth is so elusive. Like the unicorn, it might not even exist, so as the end of time approaches, it seems pointless and wasteful to keep pursuing it.

Now when fabricating this new outlook on life, you still need some kind of fair witness to guide you in the construction of your meta-reality. Otherwise you could find yourself blinded by the rose-colored glasses you've only just put on. You need to achieve some kind of balance, and it's not easy. You might worry that you're just rebranding yourself, but it's more like building a better brand of you. It's just getting to know yourself as well your search engine does.

This isn't some kind of virtual second life, rather a chance to re-evaluate the way you perceive your actual life. Once you have the proper perception in place, you've got yourself a new reality. The beauty part is if it breaks down, you can tweak it or acquire an entirely new slant. It's your end of times—you drive it.

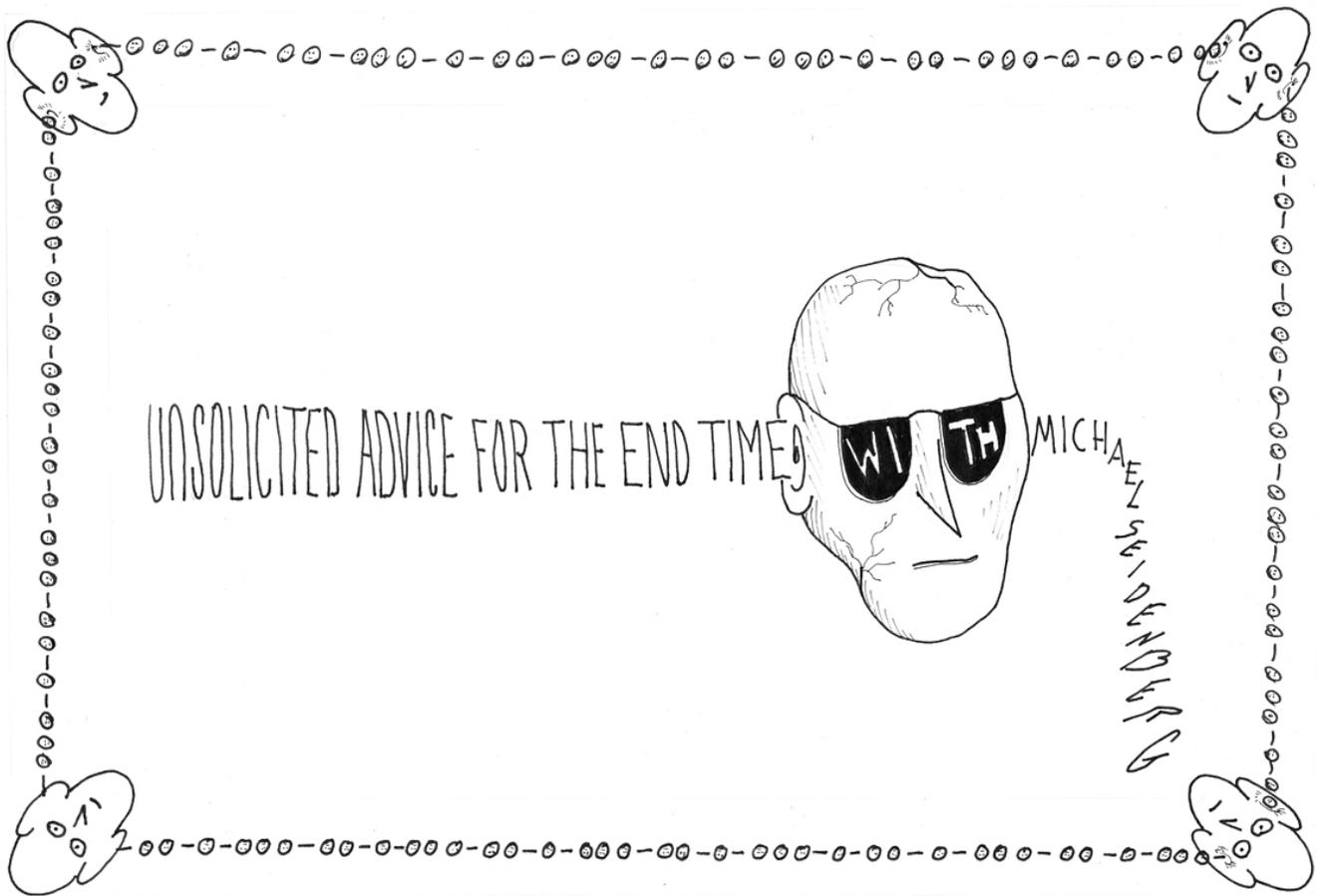
Still, there are dangers in being your own creator. If you need to delude yourself a bit, that's fine, but I recommend small doses. You want to avoid becoming one of those heavy-handed self-creators who have no limits to their own grandeur. What do you think allows Jay Z to presume that just his presence is charity and that his very corporeal existence is the highest form of benevolence he can bestow on his fellow humans? That being said, I must say I do appreciate his going green and removing the hyphen from his name.

While we all want to be hearing

good news, we don't want to lose our ability to smell a rat. For example, you might hear the new pope saying that being gay is not a sin and it's not for him to judge, but overlook him saying that acting gay is indeed very much a sin. It's a veritable "some of my best friends are..." moment and not to be ignored. You don't want to get caught thinking someone is giving a thumb's-up when they are saying only that they won't point a finger.

There are many responsibilities in being the architect of your own existence, so tread carefully. But make sure you're wearing your favorite shoes. ■





I HAVE A dream of all people living out the end times squeezing every little bit of joy out of every last moment. But I may not get there with you. I worry sometimes as I give this advice that it won't be used as I intended—that rather than being helpful it might wind up being hurtful.

This worries me, not my own impending doom. Someone has to go first, and if there is a heaven (which I doubt), the first responders will get a good seat. No, it's for all of you that I fear. What if I haven't been clear enough in my counseling? All my pointers could turn out to be pointless, my directions a distraction.

I'm starting to think I might have made my suggestions too understandable. It doesn't always help to be intelligible. Sometimes a

healthy lack of lucidity, with just a soupçon of incoherence, can help one achieve the proper mind set to get where we want to be.

I might explicitly tell you how important it is to respect the past if you want the most out of your limited future, but I wouldn't want you to end up like the Lunardelli clan in Italy. They are winemakers, and to show their respect for those that have come before them, they have released a series of Nazi-related wines for the past 20 years. They say they are not anti-Semitic, explaining that it's all about history. They believe their sense of history is broad, as they have also produced some tasty Stalin and Mussolini vintages, and of course for the ladies, a spunky Eva Braun zinfandel.

I say too much history. No offense, Clio, but history is history. We have been tethered

everyone join hands
the **END TIME** is for **EVERYBODY**



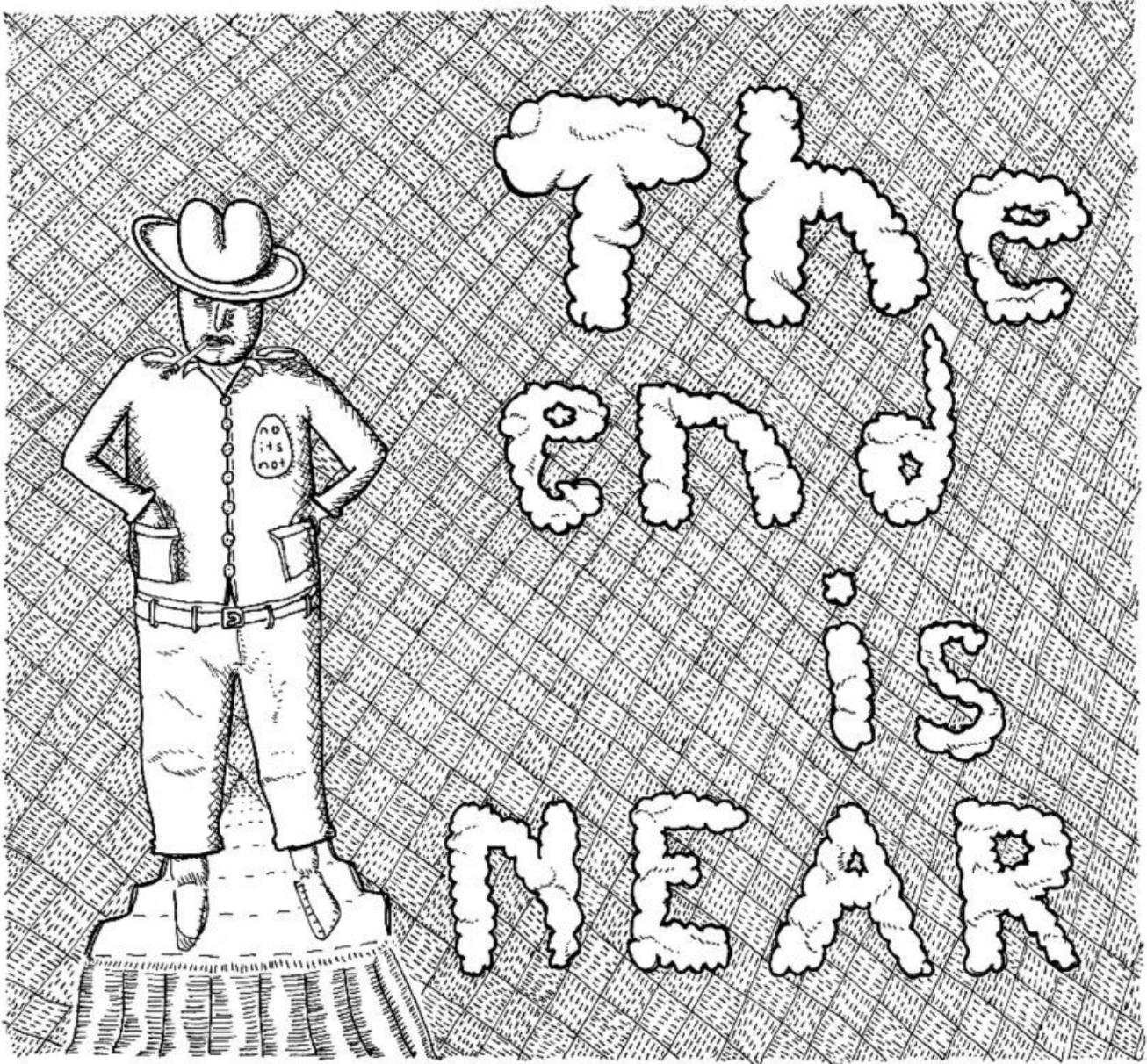
to the truth for far too long. We ache to get back and we need to get back to that gray area, that womb for wayfarers of peace and peace of mind.

I suggest now that we have to abandon history for its more user-friendly neighbor, gistory. In point of fact, we need to stop paying such fealty to factuality: There is no one truth, and memory is a sieve. We need the truth that soothes and the remembrances that move us along. Often right beside the reality we have come to accept lives a slightly altered version that wants you to be happy. You just have to trust it. Gistory is and will always be there for you; it has your back. It's your wingman and your fair witness. It can turn madness into genius and sadness into glee.

Think of it like the history of art: It begins literal but then when it needs to, it advances

into more creative ways of approaching life. I'm not asking you to go all abstract expressionist in your rearranging of reality, but certainly a little impressionism can go a long way. Any idiot can see what's going on right in front of their eyes, but it takes a visionary with that necessary sense of ambiguity to distinguish what they see from what they think they've seen. You get the gist ... well I hope you do.

If you've been reading this column for a while, I have hopefully rope-a-doped you into the proper state of muddled thinking you're going to need to come along with me and to continue on after I'm gone. If we've learned anything, it's that no matter how much you learn about life or how great an attitude you have, you might still be eating your breakfast in a sinkhole. ■



LET ME SAY right up front, black is the new black, and if I had my way, it would always be.

We live in a time that seems too aware of trending, and as a result we can easily become a victim of any societal shift coming around the corner. While I'm a big fan of remote-control television, I would have to say that most trends are not to be trusted. We're hungry for whatever flavor of the month is being served, and it's so easy to swallow the wrong thing.

Politicians are especially vulnerable, as they are already poll-trained to jump on any bandwagon they can find a seat on. Recently, Democratic Senator Bob Menendez declared that after reading Vladimir Putin's op-ed piece about Syria in the *New York Times*, he "almost wanted to vomit." This proclivity to announce intentions to upchuck then crossed the aisle, when New Jersey's Republican Governor Chris Christie, upon hearing of the boardwalk burning down in Seaside Heights right

after recently being rebuilt, said, “I feel like I want to throw up, and that’s me.”

But it’s not just him: This fad has also entered the more cultured parts of our society. On a popular social networking site, an esteemed member of our intelligentsia remarked that after seeing the finale of *Breaking Bad*, “he was disgusted and might puke a little”—certainly a more thoughtful and tempered entry into this new communication style, but this doesn’t bode well for a clear-headed end of times. I, for one, do not want a nausea-driven meme driving me through my life.

The little things we love will be ever so important as our days dwindle away. For me, radio is a necessary part of my life, and I like my radio public. I prefer my airwaves commercial free and not traveling in every new direction that groupthink takes us. Unfortunately, WNYC, my local station seems far too eager to follow. They have altered their programming, banishing less *au courant* shows while replaying Jian Ghomeshi interviewing Jad Abumrad about their mutual love for local host Soterios Johnson over and over again. Then we are invited to follow them on Twitter, and visit them online to watch videos. It seems that attempting to follow the latest trends has ultimately led radio to become television.

We must be vigilant. It’s a short road from selfies to selfabusies, and if our donuts can so easily become cronuts, then it won’t be long before we’re all eating blue-crystal-meth-frosted snacks. It’s easy for the new to be groovy, but it’s always more rewarding to

do your own thing, I think Sly and the Family Stone said it best: “Thank you (falettinme be mice elf agin).”

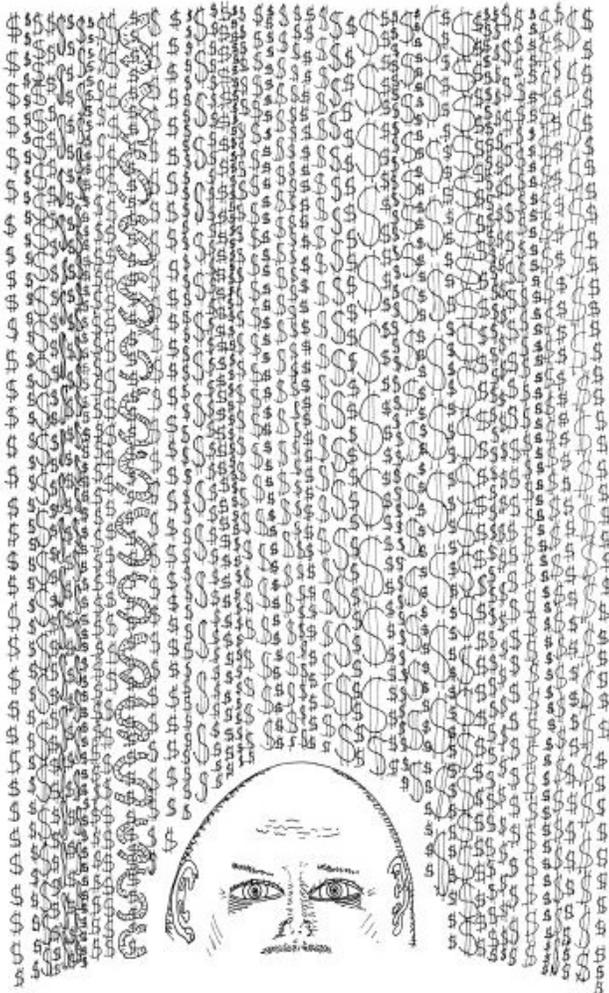
If what they say is true, that everything old is new again, then it stands to reason that many of these fresh ideas will get stale. We don’t want new directions if they take us to the wrong destination.

If you think I make too much of a fuss about the danger of these trends, I have one word for you: *v*. The dirndl dress is now the fastest growing fashion craze in Munich. You know what they say: “Today the Rhineland, tomorrow the world.” If we allow trends to go unchecked, it won’t be long before a bevy of Bavarian-clad beauties are goose-stepping down the runways of the world. Dirndls are a gateway. Before long, black-shirts are the new black. ■



UNSOLICITED ADVICE FOR THE END of TIME

WITH YOUR READER AND ADVISER
MICHAEL SEIDENBERG



IT SEEMS TO me that this might be the prudent time to advise you to question whether you should be listening to my or any advice, let alone taking it.

First, we need to ask ourselves, Is there a sell-by date for guidance? Words of wisdom can certainly wither. Although it might take a while, the usefulness of some council can diminish like bone density, and before you know it, there is a break in the smooth flow of your life. The shock of the newly old—I just want you to have some cushioning. That’s all I ever wanted. In fact, I see this column as a plumping up of the pillows of your life.

As time goes by, knowledge grows and we have to grow with it. In the 1960s, the British schools advised students in the event of a nuclear attack to put a paper bag over their heads. Now science has taught us that is just not enough. We need to check that the bag is gluten-free, and if it turns out that mercury is in retrograde at the time of this attack, then just grab a beer and some sunglasses and enjoy the light show.

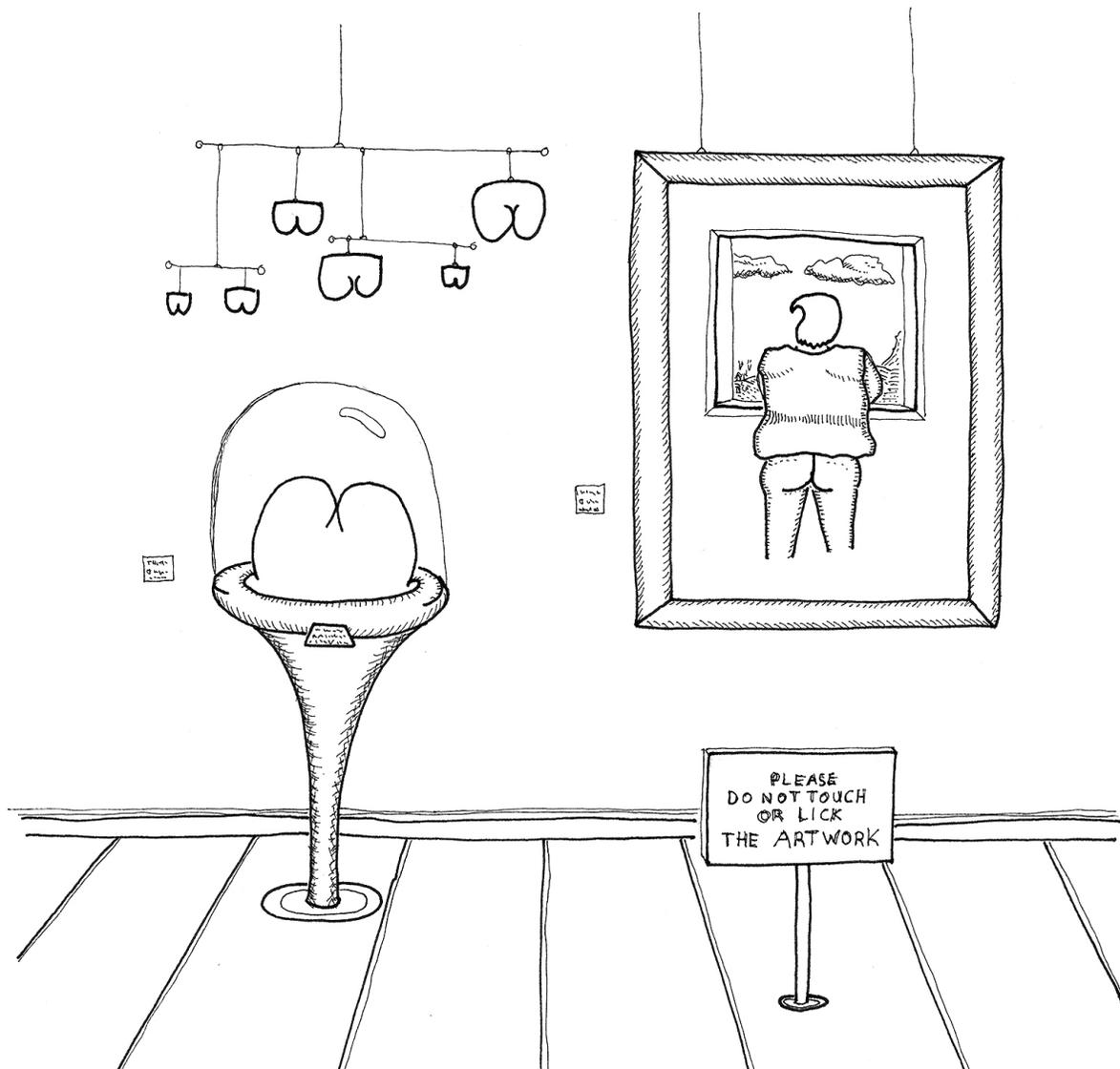
We learn as we go on, and sometimes it takes years before we really know the truth of a thing. We all remember when former president Bush the younger creeped us all out by giving a back massage to German chancellor Angela Merkel. When he groped her at that G8 summit in St. Petersburg, we all cringed with a superior sense of right and wrong. Well, who’s laughing now? We thought he was making the ultimate frat boy move on Ms. Merkel when actually he was subtly planting a listening device on her. Be chagrined, be very chagrined.

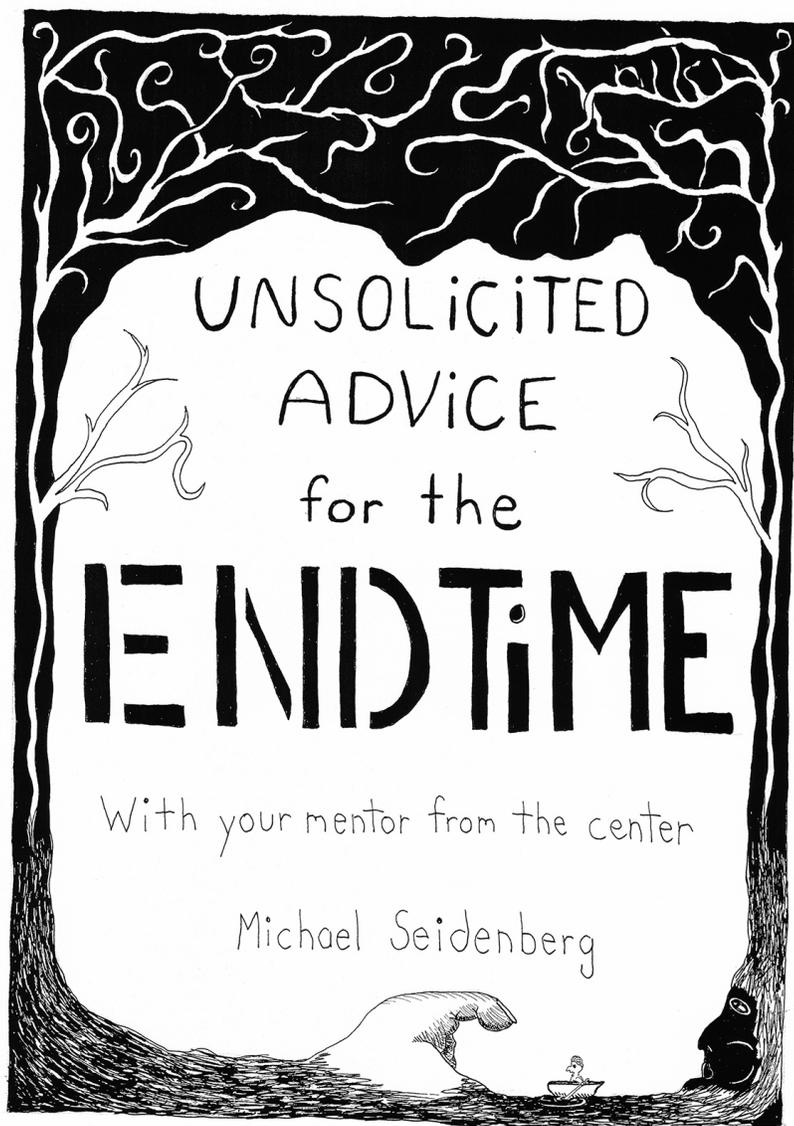
There also seems to be a tsunami of lifestyle tips floating through social networks, and we don't want to drown in a sea of suggestions. We should be able to filter out our uninvited guides while we troll for cute animal videos, but the prophylactic device has not been built that can protect you from the virus of advice. Sure, it seems helpful and harmless when your internet friends tell you how great your bangs look or how brilliant your latest cultural gift to world was. Yes, I can see myself in your shiny bangs, and I will read your life-altering manifesto, but if all this was true, then we'd be living in a new age of enlightenment and it would be hawt.

It's not just the where and when of tak-

ing advice that I'm questioning but also the offering of it. It's not like I always want to be handing out polite pointers and spewing helpful hints. Especially when I have a toothache, which is what I've had for a week. I went to see my dentist, and he was baffled by my pain. He saw no reason for it and said, Let's see where it goes. What did I think the end of times was gonna be like?

This is why I suggest a periodic re-evaluation: lifestyle tune-ups to see what needs tweaking and what needs tossing. Some might think it's a sign of weakness to change your opinions or change your feelings about others' opinions, but remember, the Empire State Building stands tall, but only because it sways. ■





IF TWITTER HAS taught us anything (and it's taught me nothing), it's that the words we read are not always beacons of truth but sometimes just typing. When receiving emails encouraging you to enlarge yourself, it would seem as if someone has your best interests in mind and truly wants you to live a fuller life. A further reading of these e-mails might give a clearer picture. At first I thought they had my back, but after closer scrutiny I realized

it was another region of mine they were interested in.

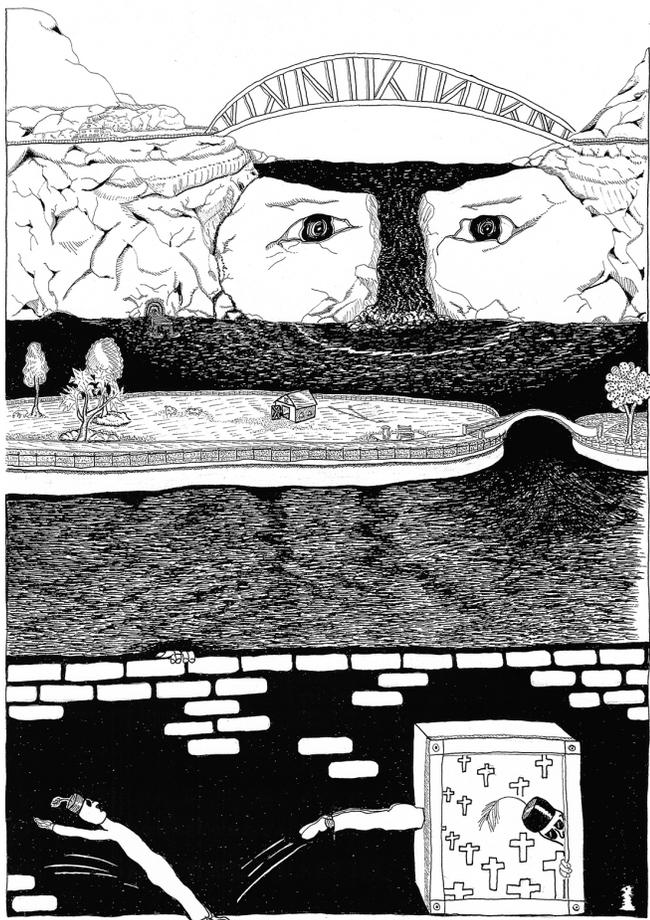
I don't doubt that fantastic gains are guaranteed, and maybe they do want me to have a bigger and better life. Not that I don't want to give my partner the best of me—and of course I'd want to see the desire in her eyes. But I'm given pause when I read that nothing beats a huge stick and that my love tool will be set to thrill.

It can be a difficult task to decipher the truths of life, trying to make sense of the patterns that appear around us. The attempt to understand the messages we receive should be handled with great care, especially as the end of time looms. For me, before heeding any message, I like to know who's speaking. I have always been a strong propo-

nent of "take it from whom it comes" advice filter, but these days people

seem to consider not just who advice comes from but also the delivery system that brings it to them and sometimes the age of the deliverer. Since the advent of the hands-free phone, it is no longer so easy to recognize the insane. It was once a comfort to walk the streets knowing when to veer to avoid the person screaming crazily into the air. Now you wouldn't be able to walk down any street

using this antiquated system—plus you take the chance of being flashed by some ranter who you thought was just an agitated stockbroker. But the worst filter, surely, is “What does everyone else just like me think about this?” When Louis CK proclaims on a late-night television talk show the danger of the Internet and says we need to put down our electronic devices, people proclaim him a genius. Somehow none of these people noticed that they spread the news of this new neo-Luddite prophet through the electronic miracle of social networking, which is built on a series of networks but is not necessarily



social at all.

Conversely, when E.L. Doctorow, on accepting a lifetime-achievement medal at the National Book Awards, warned about the dangers of the Internet and expressed his preference for books over e-books, he was deemed out of touch and out of time. Strangely, his distrust of the virtual world was interpreted as his being disconnected from reality. He was then virtually buried under an avalanche of insulting tweets and status updates, mostly using cultural references he most likely wouldn't understand. He didn't even see the deadly memes coming at him.

We must blend the old and the new. Our magic bullet will be made of equal parts past and present. When the lighter was invented, people did not abandon matches, and when the ever popular vibrator popped on the scene, no one made a case for getting rid of the penis. Well, some people did, but I took it from whom it came. We need to communicate more carefully, listen, and speak with more thought. We should not be getting excited about being able to talk to our phones, televisions, and cars until we master the art of hearing and being heard by living organisms.

Remember, when a person is being described to you as being batshit crazy by a person you know to be batshit crazy, it might be time to ask who is who and what is what. The great revealer admits that sometimes a cigar is just a cigar, but we still have to know what it is when it isn't. ■

