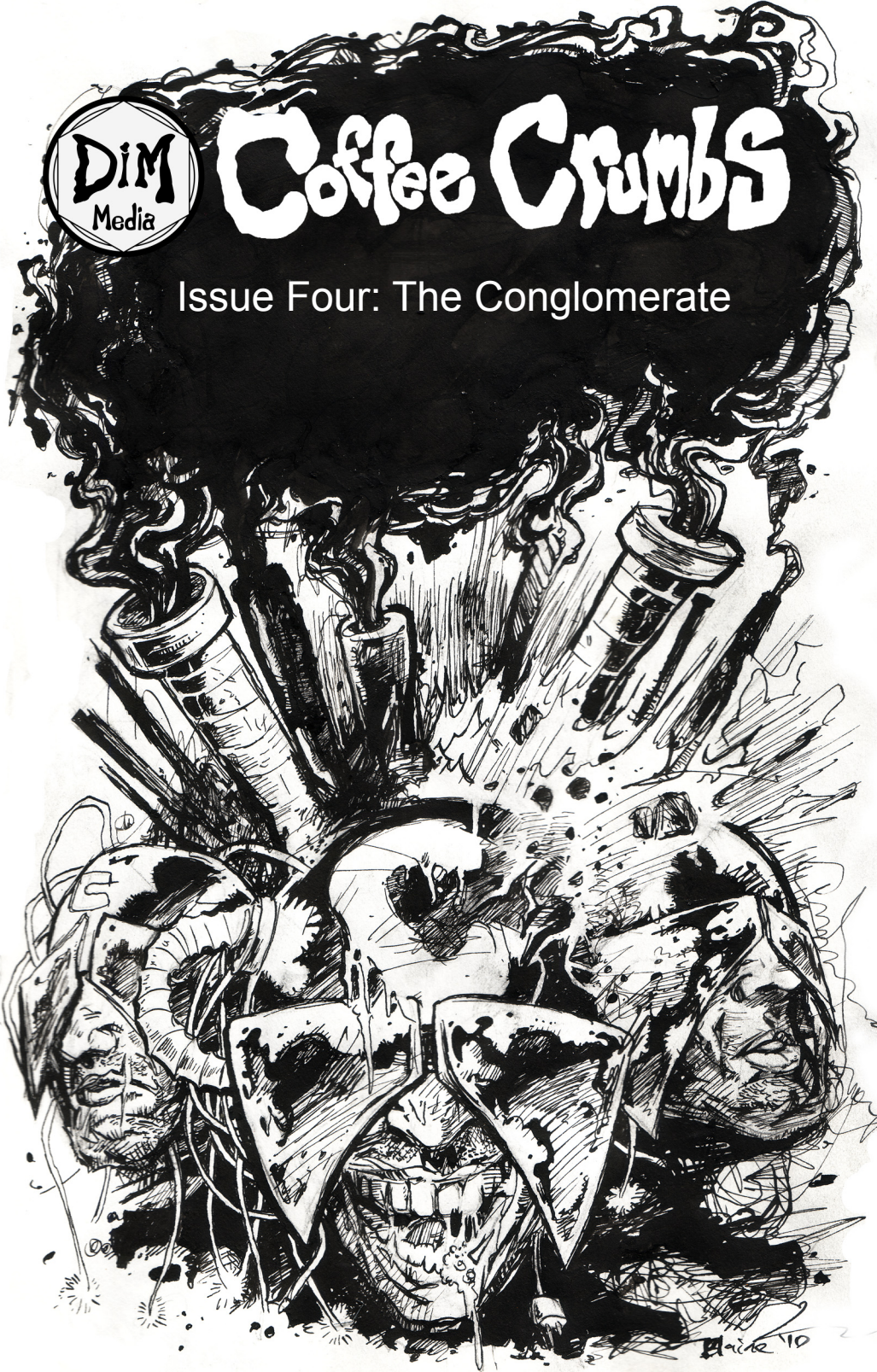




Coffee Crumbs

Issue Four: The Conglomerate



Haide 10

Hello ello ello?

Oh hi!!! It's us, Dim Media!

After several months in hiatus, Coffee Crumbs is back, and this time it's personal. Our return issue is a special issue and by special I mean it only has one story in it. There is also a poem, but that's it. (Unless you count this page and the credits, which I don't, and honestly why would you?)

If you are an avid Dim follower then you noticed we changed fonts. Lucida Bright turned on us, so we switched to reliable Ariel. You will find its readability makes up for its familiarity.

In other news we now have an Etsy Account and a residency at Karnak Gallery. So please go out there and find us, before we find you. (Creepy orchestra hit)

The most popular ways of finding us are listed below.

<http://www.etsy.com/shop/DimMedia>

<http://storyofdim.com/>

dimmedia@gmail.com

You have two weeks. After that we're coming to your door, and if that happens you better pray you have enough beer. Oh that's not a problem? Alright, then it's settled, we'll see you later this week!

Respectfully yours,

Dim Media

Present Day: March 12, 2056

No Christmas this year. No Jolly Saint Nick, no Easter Bunny and no Mickey Mouse either. The world has moved on. Humanity, like a stiff abortion, is being nurtured in the arms of an evil empire. The Conglomerate Corporation spreads its shroud of death across the globe. The flag of the steel 'C' flails in the wind.

Two-thirds of the world's population have been lost. The Conglomerate is an unstoppable force. A mechanical army emerged. The months that followed were carnage or submission. No one could stop the wave of world destruction. The army of dark robotic soldiers swept across the globe in a tidal wave of thunder, murder, and marching feet. They stomped on women, children, and the wounded without mercy. Fires burned, buildings collapsed, cities filled with vanishing ghosts. The slaughter of thousands coated the streets in a blanket of death. For ten days, the skies grew black. The army moved westward.

On the eleventh day, gray clouds parted and the Free Alliance stepped forth as the last hope for salvation. Upon the front lines of the Middle East, and the Ancient Holy Lands, the Alliance collided with the forces of the Conglomerate's Army and held them back.

They were ready and the war continues...



The Conglomerate

Written by Charles Denton

Illustrated by Blaine Garrett



"What's that noise?" His weak hand raises to the windowsill.

"I don't know."

"Make it stop."

"I can't."

Julian rolls across the stiff blood-stained mattress. Hard springs jut into his ribs. The pain registers. He is regretfully, still alive. Finding the window, he pulls the white Victorian sill closed and cuts off the clatter below. Paint flakes away from the woodwork and falls over his head like snowflakes. Julian brushes them off.

Gears turn outside, pounding and banging, ten floors below.

"What are they doing down there?" He sits up and rubs his face. "It's been going on since I got here."

"I don't know. Probably building something to defeat the resistance."

Julian's lower spine aches and cracks as he twists.

"This must have been a nice place to live." He looks around the vacant apartment scratching the bristle of his chin. It's been a few weeks since shaving and the hair has mossed over his face.

He pulls back the dark curtains and peers out the window. It's still there, the lack of life and the black factory boiling like a cancer. He winces. The loss of a beautiful free land thrashed hate in his heart. He crawls out of bed. A crimson pillow falls to the floor. Julian's hairy feet touch the carpet.

"What a nice apartment."

"You mean, it used to be."

"Yeah, it used to be..."

"Probably was a cozy nook for a family. A family of three."

"Yes, fit for three." Julian falls to his knees.

Painful memories flood his mind. His wife's pleas, his daughter's motionless body in the corner, the dark looming soldier with red eyes, the screaming. The horror! It couldn't be real, just a dream. All a dream, he will one day wake from.

"A happy family. A happy family." Julian's body convulses, and he buries his face deep in the meaty flesh of his palms. A fist jerks out, crashing into the plaster wall. Tiny cracks form and dust falls. He yells and his elbow breaks through the thin window pane. It shatters. Glass shards fall to the floor.

Glass is a slow-moving liquid. On buildings of the early 20th century, the panes are thicker at the bottom than at the top. This is due to the effect of gravity over long durations of time, moving transparent sand molecules like a heavy frozen waterfall.

The slow moving medium shatters and a sharp edge slashes through Julian's elbow. The pain brings him back to the present. The factory outside thrashing, gears squealing, the screaming floods the room. Julian sits sobbing, leaning up against the wall.

"Look what you've done."

"Shut up." He grumbles.

"Now you're bleeding. How is this a good thing?"

"Shut up I said."

"I hope you're happy."

"I am."

"You have to forget about them. Forget about it all."

Julian rips a piece of cloth from the white bed sheet and ties it around his arm. The knot turns red. He picks up his assault rifle and looks through the scope at the factory. Black cross-hairs move through the crowd of workers. He could kill any one of them with a squeeze of the trigger. That could make everything better.

Metal bangs against metal, echoing within the stone walls of the factory. Gas valves hiss, steam lurches into the air, dry gears grind and wear into each other. The noise goes on forever. The factory never sleeps. It constantly builds, functioning, manufacturing, and pumping black smoke into the darkening skies.

Soot and ash coat the workers. They have productive duties. All of them, with neat silver helmets and the letter 'C' on the foreheads. The helmets remind Julian of something common he'd seen 21st century motorcyclists wear, with black visor shields. Julian follows a man in his sights. He looks young, mid-20's. Julian's finger twitches at the trigger. He wants to pull it. He wants to give the pain way. The gun shakes in his grip and eventually lowers. Not today. Julian falls to his knees again, sliding against the wall. He fingers through his thinning hair and puts on his boots.

Three days pass, and it feels like home. Miracle has gifted Julian this abandoned thirteen-floor apartment building. It has all the luxuries and amenities except for electricity.

Over the past two weeks, Julian walked westward across the carnage of Europe. Town after town he traveled over centuries of architecture burned to ash, a graveyard of cobblestone. Fires crackling, cars on their sides, children's toys melted into sidewalks, charred remnants of trees, and scavengers in hiding.

During Julian's migration from France through the sewers and underground tunnels, he learned of an alliance. Graffiti in the subways spoke of it as last the last remaining strength against the Corporation.

This hope has led him here, to this apartment complex, which he inhabits with the dead. Refrigerators infested with fat maggots crawl over decomposing contents. Bread alive with living organic substances, a jungle of white and green fuzz. Milk in bottles curdled thick and sour. Mold coated the walls of appliances. Everything beyond edible, except in the pantries. They contain canned food and dried noodles.

The last three days, Julian has been eating like a king, tearing open tin cans and devouring the contents with his fingers. Even the plumbing works. The only missing element of old life, is hot water.

Beloved items and cherished objects left behind like fragments of dream: smiling family portraits with parents holding their children coated in dust, cobwebs and cockroaches climbing the walls, silver frames, expensive mirrors, cherry-stained shelves, silk drapes, hand carved tables with cute doilies, mahogany bassinets, dining rooms with fine china and sparkling crystal forgotten, locked glass cabinets. Dresser tops covered in women's jewelry, glittering gems, diamonds, gold and sparkling silver, new plush couches, now soiled by rainwater and rodents, a black leather jacket hanging motionless on a coat hanger. It appears everyone went mysteriously on vacation, a permanent relocation, without packing any belongings.

Julian moves throughout the building searching for food and other needed items: toilet paper, dental floss, toothpastes, shampoo, and bathroom amenities. It's been two weeks since he brushed his teeth or bathed. All those simple common commodities, all those happy wonderful parts of life that are overlooked; combing your hair, washing your face, a dry towel, clean socks, a nice shirt, air conditioning. The things that make people happy, they are so easily taken for granted, until they are gone. Only then,

do we understand how much they are a part of ourselves. Identity locked into daily rituals of habitual happiness.

Common living isn't so common once it is gone, mouthwash, dental floss, antibacterial soap, clean underwear, deodorant.

Julian found a razor and a green tube of shaving cream. Today, he will trim his beard and see his face once again. The blade is sharp, clean, and cuts diagonal with the grain of his face. It is a little too sharp. Blood drips in the sink, mixing with the floating hair and foam. He dips the razor in the cold water and shakes it. The blade slides across his chin again.

In a nearby closet he finds a polyester shirt. He buttons it up and puts on a blue and gold striped necktie. With a plastic comb, he slicks back his hair. For five resonating seconds he... almost feels good. This near feeling quickly fades and Julian remains standing, staring back at his sad reflection in the mirror. Pathetic broken eyes peer at him from the illusionary window. They will not look away. Tears swell and fall into the blood-foamed water.

Creeping through the hallway, Julian remembers a vacation he and his family took. They stayed in a hotel near the ocean. The sea breeze seeped in their bedrooms at night and left salt on their lips. The hallway of this hotel is similar to that one, flower-patterned carpet, gold trim boards, and wallpaper with weaving petals.

He opens the door to room 212. White moths made of dust flutter. Furniture crowds the living room in void of conversation. Magazines lay on the floor. A rat scurries into the hall. Cobwebs dangle from the ceiling fan. A pair of loafers sits, wishing to be worn again. An oak chair rests at a table. Dry chicken bones on a white plate.

Julian cautiously explores the apartment checking each room. First the living room, then the kitchen and finally the bedroom. Hesitantly, he opens each door. A bloated man rots in his sleep. Flies circle above the gray corpse. A swollen purple hand hangs over the bed covered in dry blood. Chewed-off fingertips reveal little nubs of bone. The dinner Julian ate last night finds its way onto the carpet.



This is how his days progress and the factory outside pounds away. Being the building's only resident he freely relocates every couple days into a new tomb of an apartment, and cleans up the death.

Yesterday, a couple lay clutched together in a decomposing embrace. Lovers gunned down during intimacy: her blue breast under his decaying hand, a beetle crawling over her face. Maggots have cleaned out her eye sockets, leaving dark holes in an endless empty stare. Her mouth, screaming from orgasm or fright, is dried like leather.

Dusting the furniture as if he were home, Julian goes about cleaning apartments, wrapping the dead in bed sheets, and dragging them down the hallway. At end of each floor's north wing he piles them in a shared monastery.

In each apartment he moves into, there are clothes, clean socks, fresh underwear, a toilet, and plenty of dry food. He boils pots of water on the stove and fills a bath. His frail body, thin and withering, sinks to the bottom.

The haunting lonely days pass. Every morning he wakes to the endless clinking of the factory, and every afternoon he visits the East wing to watch them. Below, the men work diligently, slaving in the black smoke, and building the mechanical army.

Each night, Julian goes to the roof of the thirteen-floor building. He peers westward watching the red sun go down amongst the towers of smoke. Out there, the war continues, the skies bleed misery and the days turn to darkness. He thinks of his daughter, Helene, and of his wife Josephine. He thinks of how life was. He tries remembering what the world was like, a day at the park, a flock of ducks, and a clown tying balloon animals, a yellow giraffe.

No one has suspected Julian's presence. He has been relatively safe living in the middle of an evacuated city somewhere in Bulgaria.

This has become the problem. He can't keep living here. Three months have passed. His food supply dwindles. He must move on.

If his 7th grade geography proves useful, he plans to move southwest, into Turkey traveling south of the Black Sea. If he reaches the Middle East he'll be at the front lines of the war. This is the only way to go from this location. From the top of the building, Julian can see in all directions. Most of the small dwellings below appear destroyed. Everything vacant, broken, burned, ash, except for the factory. It never stops breathing smoke. Julian guesses he'll find the same things in the houses below as he's found in this apartment: plenty of toiletries, dead families, and discarded possessions, all the remnants scavengers haven't taken.

East of the village and winding south is a narrow river. Using this river for southward travel, it may lead to the Black Sea. He'll pack enough supplies and food for a week. Too much weight will make the journey unbearable. With any luck he'll find a boat. He'll move during the night and sleep in the day. He'll creep through each town along the river and follow the red skies of war. He'll walk directly towards the glow of explosions. The same fire and smoke he's watched every night from the rooftop. He'll travel into the center of the battle from behind enemy lines.

His elbow heals. White window shades wave in the morning wind. They are open, letting in the breeze. Plump pigeons perch on the sill like fat, feathered gargoyles. Mechanical laughter clatters below from the factory.





"What are you going to do now?"

"I told you. I have a plan."

"Oh yes, I forgot about that, your wonderful plan."

Silence

"It's not going to work."

"Yes it will."

"You're so sure?"

"Yes."

"You really think you'll be able to survive?"

"Maybe."

"Maybe."

"No."

"You're brilliant."

"If you have a better idea, I'm open for suggestions."

"How about we stay here and keep watching the factory."

Julian peers through his faint transparent reflection in the window. "We could do that." He says watching all the little dots of men moving about.

"It is the safer option."

"I suppose, but..."

"But what?"

"The food won't last."

"We can raid the village."

"It's dangerous to move about the city."

"So?"

"So, this isn't any way to live. I'm sick of scurrying like a rodent."

"Do we have a choice? "

"We could go down there and join them. We could work in the factory and wear one of those fancy helmets. We could walk to the tall dark smoke stacks, knock on the front door and ask for an application. We could write a resume. It would say, 'Local Lonesome Scavenger, looking for occupation and purpose in life. Currently lost family and all possessions. Hoping for new career opportunities."

Hard worker.' They'll give us the job and we'll be happy. We'll work diligently towards the better good of the ultimate goal, one world domination. We'll work for the Conglomerate!"

Julian's fists clench. He strikes the wall.

"NEVER!"

Plaster crumbles under his knuckles. One of the factory workers glances strangely upward at the thirteen-story building. Julian doesn't notice. Nor does he see the man pointing up at him to one of the security personnel. Julian's thoughts are elsewhere.

"I will never join the Conglomerate. They murdered my family!" Julian falls to his knees. Tears collecting in his eye sockets streak down his face. "She was only four years old." He buries his face in his palms and weeps. "Never. Never, never."

Defeated, hunched over and helpless.

This morning Julian found a book to pass the time with. 'The Stranger,' by Albert Camus. Luckily, it was in an English translation. He begins reading it, sitting comfortably on the toilet, digesting page after page. A sentence strikes him, page 57, about half way through, "To stay or to go, it amounted to the same thing."

To stay here or to go, what difference does it make? It is the same thing, death in here or death out there, what is the difference?

"Yes, what is the difference?"

"Quiet you!"

"Why don't you go get that fancy gun of yours and suck on the long end of the barrel? Put some teeth marks in it. Shove it deep into your yapping mouth and make this go away. Make it better. Pull the trigger. Make it end. Put you and me out of our misery."

The book fell in his naked lap. For a minute Julian contemplated this option. It doesn't sound too bad of an idea. What did surviving another day matter, even if he could make it into the battlefields and help the Alliance, what then? Without Josephine and Helene, he had nothing. The Conglomerate will win in the end. They will take over the world. What use is fighting the inevitable?

"Ok." He says silently, "You win."

"It's about time we come to reason, and agree on something."

Julian wipes himself with the cotton soft 'Downy.' He lifts his pant. His thumb touches the brass flush handle and, he hears voices, footsteps, someone else in the building. His gun is in the next room.

Three soldiers are on the same floor Julian is on. Their boots stomp outside his front door. Julian has gotten lazy. How could they have snuck up on him so fast?

"Clear." The soldier in front says into a mouthpiece. The other two follow and repeat.

Room by room, they search the apartments. One man enters, the other two follow, guns forward.

Their uniforms fit to their bodies, tied around the knees and elbows, black leather gloves, gloss black helmets with a silver letter 'C' in the center of their foreheads, a blue-tinted visor, their eyes like futuristic sunglasses. Wires connect their helmets to their computerized backs. Tubes stick into their mechanical flesh. Their motions are stern and smooth, like a can opener hungry for tin. A race of machine men, the astonishing product of the factory's endless hard work.

Julian shuts the lid of the toilet without flushing.

"Clear!"

Shooting all three soldiers isn't a possibility. Julian has never fired a weapon in his life. What does he know about killing?

A data input analyzer has zero background in arsenal tactics. When his life was normal, back in Paris, when Josephine was alive, and Helene could smile, there was no concern for operating projectile devices.

His gun pulses in his mind, in the next room, propped up against the bed, unable to reach. It is there, sitting, glowing in the daylight. The soldiers are in the hallway. They are at his front door, again, just like before, only this time, he knows why they are here.

The door bursts open.

“Clear!”

Guns raised with perfect aim scan the room, a white sofa, a table of family photos, a set of car keys, a clean dusted end table.

“Clear!”

The small dining room, an extension to the kitchen: pots and pans on the counter, an empty bowl of rice Julian ate last night in the sink, forever to be unwashed.

Black helmets glisten daylight leaking in from the windows.

“Clear!”

The bedroom: blankets and clothes rummaged in a mishap mess across the room, and an unmade bed where Julian slept last night. His Assault Rifle in the corner. A dresser covered in expensive jewelry, silver, and gems, women’s earrings and necklaces hanging from a nude female sculpture. Julian thought Josephine would have loved them.

“Clear!” shouts the mechanical voice.

“There is a weapon here,” the other soldier says. “Someone has been here.”

“Could be a scavenger.”

“Could be a scout for the Alliance.” The robot man holds Julian’s weapon and cocks the chamber letting the magazine fall to the floor. “This weapon is empty sir. There is no ammunition.”

No bullets! Julian thinks almost out loud. I've been carrying an empty gun for months without a single bullet!

"No threat sir, probably a scavenger looking for a warm place to stay."

"Let's hunt him down."

The soldier drops the rifle. It crashes to the hardwood floor.

They check the closet.

"Clear."

They check the bathroom.

"Clear."

They look through everything.

"The perpetrator might be in another room. Let's move on."

Dangling like a spider from its web, Julian hangs from the sill outside. The soldiers move on to the next apartment without checking out the bathroom window. He struggles to pull himself inside, falling to the checkered tile floor. His heart throbbed, and the sound resonated inside his skull. Pigeon droppings coated his hands white.

The soldier's footsteps echo down the hallway walking further and further away. Julian goes over to his rifle and picks it up. He puts it to his head, and pulls the trigger. 'Click,' 'Click,' 'Click,'

Empty. He couldn't kill himself if he wanted to. Tonight, at dusk, he decides to leave.

From the rooftop he watches the sun set for the last time. A dark storm rolls in the West. Julian finds a fancy bow tie in the closet. He puts it around his neck like a noose, and carries his only friend, the unloaded rifle, like a child holding a teddy bear. The barrel drags behind him down the hallway. In the stairwell, he finds a Conglomerate soldier's helmet. It must have been left behind during the death raids. It fit like Cinderella's glass slipper. He smiles for the first time in six months.

He opens the front door into the cold night. He steps from the building for the first time in months, with gun in hand. He exits into the dark rain, waiting, wishing to die, a man with nothing.



Roar Shock Test (Ok, Dr. Freud)

By Brandon Guttermuth
Illustrated by Joe Lipscomb

Part 1

post apocalyptic like a druid with a gimmick like
sigourney weaver on the cover of a misfits
album where salvia dreams of gorillas in the mist
caught in high beams like shuriken slit wrists
with bent lips and crispix nom nom wheat thins geez
kid i can't believe that you bought this
oh wait you didn't cause it's free? i'm gonna inject a
canvas with HI FUCKING V





Part 2

like john connor i'm squeaky voiced from ganja and a lack of
pubes dude
i've booty bumped terminated lubed up quaaludes through
droughts and
monsoons of robot farts and stephen hawking squawk box
retard parts
just you when you thought evolution had lost
just when you thought we should give up our plight
arnold schwarzenegger opened his gubernatorial austrian
mouth
and proved that you were probably right

Part 3

fueled by aggression and the absolute certainty of it's determination that it is in fact the superior being, the predator just knew that ewok was gonna get raped.



Credits

Cover Art by Blaine Garrett

“The Conglomerate”

Written by Charles Denton

Illustrated by Blaine Garrett

“Roar Shock Test (Ok Dr. Freud)”

Written by Brandon Gutermuth

Illustrated by Joe Lipscomb

Layout by Joe Lipscomb

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