miniMAG

issue195

spatial

ceramic tile shades at the local E.R.

Sophia Pan

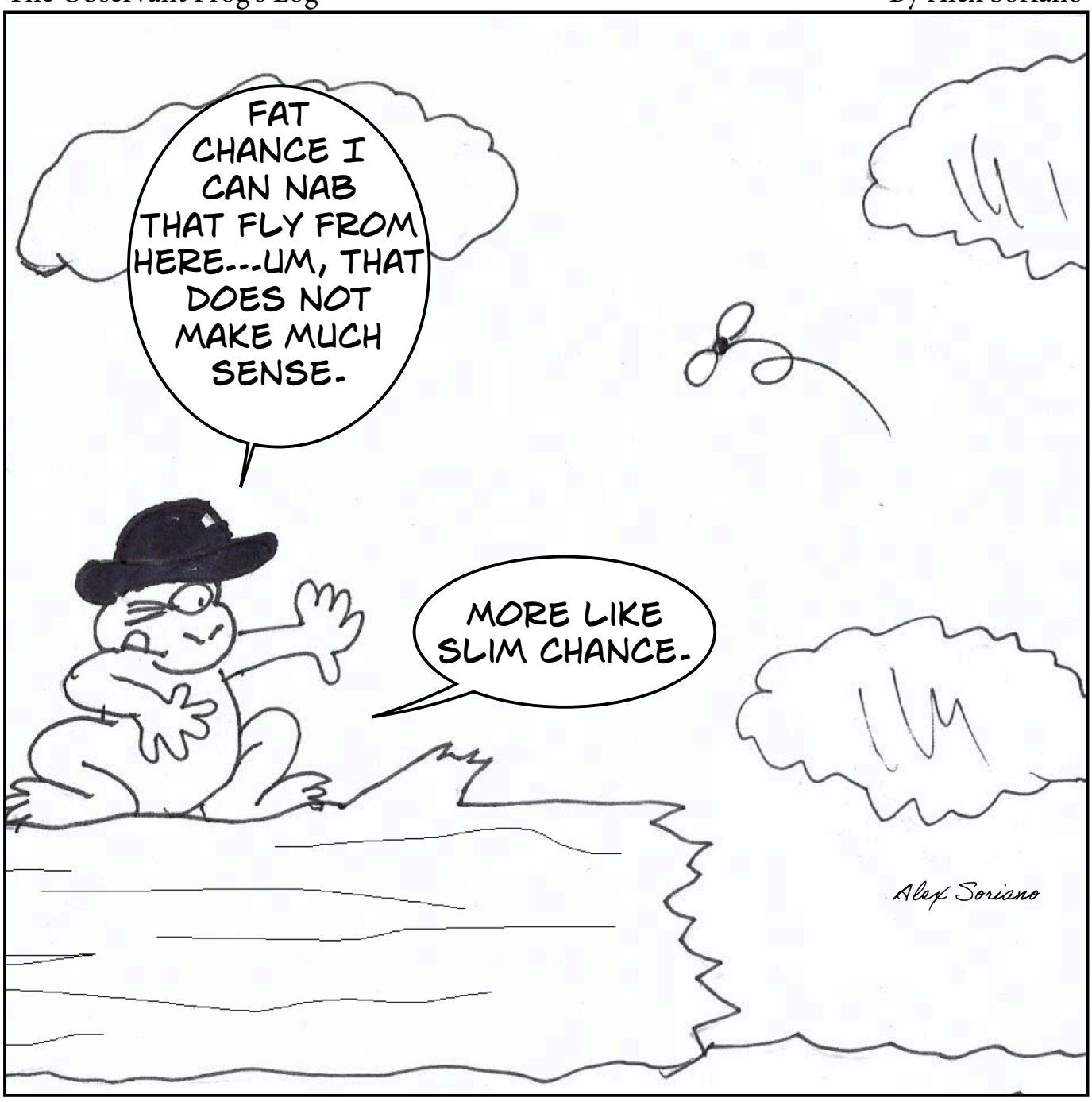
#e8f7a8
last summer the drone of pavement sounded. i prayed
in my mouth, a cascade of regurgitation. *brainwashing*,
my mother called it. getting stabbed by a needle
feeding me death, i call it my stomach, if my
tongue wasn't too busy cutting itself off while carving

#3d230c
up thanksgiving. no one visited the year this house
was a stranger, everything mixed up: find the anomaly.
a bathroom mirror. all the clocks gone. i tell time
when the downstairs banister stops ticking, when mama sat
at the dark kitchen table sleeping on budget sheets. my foot,

#ffffff
numb, oscillating up and down—too much mg.
they told me i'm *not allowed*. red tickles my upper
lip; like i'm wearing lipstick, i'm going out *looking like*
that. like roadkill. like smiley faces staring up at me
when i go blow my nose on a used tissue

#162b80
crumpled again. i don't understand wikipedia's advice
on water is for drinking not drowning, on bleeding
into lined paper blue, on what i *should want* when all
i want is for this nothingness
i want to go on and on and on.

The Observant Frog's Log By Alex Soriano



Needle

Len Slatest

Fate has a sense of humor. In my toddler chair I make history at the age of two years six months. Only a moment of that day is memory, the remainder recollections of an older self.

A sunbeam filters through the branches of our maple tree, casting my baby face in its warm glow as I watch an inchworm dangle from a thread swaying in the breeze.

A robin flies down to the stainless steel trough under the trees, cocking its head as it inches along the lip looking for food inside, but our family has turned from pig farming the year before, so it is empty. Losing interest, the redbreast flies back up to its branch and trills *beoat-beoat-beoat*, a war cry to other robins, *stay clear of my hard-won territory*.

My mother and I are in the back yard. Reclined in a green aluminum folding lounge chair she reads Fern Michaels's latest release. These are my days of safety. I am encased in her warm embrace, always, even when we are in separate rooms of the house, wherever she may be.

I instinctively throw my arms and legs outward in a Moro reflex as an unannounced burst of light reflects off something passing downward perhaps twenty-five feet in front of me followed by a *thwuppp*. This

flash is the only day's event of which I am certain, imprinted in my memory.

That evening my parents open all four doors of their new green 1958 American Motors Rambler sedan to let it cool off. Their bare legs sweat as they slide along its white-and-green plaid vinyl seat covers. The steering wheel is still hot to the touch so they pause with the windows open until the car's distinct plastic odor dissipates. Then my mother secures me in the back seat.

We drive four miles down Larkacres Road. On both sides the land is flat as Kansas, potato farms as far as the eye can see. No housing developments block sight of the horizon and cramp the future. An unobstructed warm wind sweeps across the fields through the open car windows. It smells like freedom and possibility.

Seventy-six years later that breezy sense is gone, our range of options narrower. During the intervening time, local government promoted growth to expand the tax base and deliver a promised land of suburban bliss. Like foxglove this might have been medicinal in controlled doses, but it was applied in a measure that killed the patient. Today homes, condos, and hotels stand where once there was only open country and desolate shoreline, and taxation is an even heavier burden: Someone had to pay for all those new schools and infrastructure.

Now too there is climate change and mass extinction. We are bound not by these things themselves but through the visionless orthodoxy and ossified thinking that produced them.

I am still living in the same home, as a retired experimental physicist, cleaning up the back yard.

I begin pulling fallen leaves from the pig trough. I spot a needle-sized white object deeply hidden under all of them, impaled in its metallic bottom.

Could it be? For years I've wondered whether that earliest memory was faulty.

There's stuff in my garage many people don't have. I'm getting on in years though in good condition, and have wisely invested in recent generation equipment, meaning it is lightweight. Bringing out my nanocoulomb meter I touch its contact probe to the needle. The latter has a charge.

Examining the radiograph in the garage against a fluorescent back panel reveals nothing about the needle's internal composition as though impervious, but likely because I didn't use an industrial unit.

Regardless I enlist the help of my former NASA supervisor Hans to pursue this amusing puzzle.

Whenever I ask about it in the years that follow he has nothing to report. Finally one day nine years (!) later he walks up my driveway whistling a familiar tune and announces the needle has been scrutinized using spectroscopy and spectrometry among other methods. None were able to reveal anything about its material composition, chemistry, or internal structure. I joke I'm grateful to be alive for his update.

He muses that something like a gate-all-around nanowire transistor, which uses electric current to heat the chip in a device and heal radiation exposure damage, would be needed had the needle been traveling through space.

I gently scoff at the anthropocentricity of his reference to chips. Convergent technological evolution like that is exceedingly improbable for hypothesized beings operating from a base of unearthly concepts. And if he wants to go down that rabbit hole, a collision with a mere 15 micrometre wide dust grain could've annihilated the needle.

He agrees whatever's producing the current is almost certainly not a transistor, or heating chips, and explains thinking that way simply helps him get his mind around it. On a related note he estimates the odds of my dust grain collision are only about 1 in 1050.

I'm surprised he's entertaining such a speculative scenario but sheer academic interest compels me. I remind him smaller gas and dust particles than those I mentioned could have created craters on the needle's surface, inducing it to melt from the energy of impact.

He counters the traveling object's small cross-sectional area reduces the chance of such collisions, and the outer impenetrable layer might be a lightweight heat shield also protective against gas and dust during the journey.

I protest even silica aerogel would require a thicker heat shield than the needle apparently has, to withstand atmospheric entry's extreme heat. Such is the tedium of the real world search for truth.

He is undeterred: not if it has a braking function to slow down.

I hide my impatience with all the "unlesses", "if's", "maybe's", and "possibly's" of the game he is playing.

Sensing this, Hans gets to the point: though the Planck probe was switched off in 2013, an equally precise successor was sent to space in the last five years. The new sky CMB (Cosmic Microwave Background) survey results reveal "unnatural perturbations" in these remnants of the Big Bang birth of the universe, deviations highly localized to the path between Earth and another planet. They are slight but statistically real, an anomalous, non-blackbody signal.

Beings encoding information onto the first CMB photons of the early universe, which are after all what we detect, precisely altering their properties over vast distances and possessing extremely sensitive detectors on their end, capable of interpreting changes in the already faint CMB radiation? Fantasy.

Except.

Now I remember the name of the tune Hans was whistling: "Aquarius", constellation of the Trappist-1 star system.

Conditions on those planets had previously been thought hellish, but newer models suggest some weren't hot enough to melt the planetary crust and mantle into magma, meaning water could have survived in the rock as the parent star later cooled.

Nonetheless it's more than forty light years away. Even traveling at 15% the speed of light the trip would take more than 250 years. Yet perhaps they did it the old-fashioned way: small mass, great speed, and a lot of transit time.

While not airtight, none of Hans's colleagues can provide a more satisfactory interpretation of the evidence. It leaves so many questions, such

as why the needle only started messaging within the last five years, but that is what science does. What did we expect first contact to be like? Reality is indifferent to wrapping a bow around Man's knowledge, no less on his time frame.

In the days that follow the discovery is made public. Reminiscent of the 1940s and 1950s, there is an initial burst of optimism that the aliens can save us from ourselves. As the initial shock subsides a debate ensues.

Man has a precious "once-in-our-species's-lifetime" opportunity. Why not continue our efforts to probe the internals of the alien emissary device, as well as eavesdrop on the messages from Earth it's literally writing in the stars?

The opposition vociferously counters what we have here is an invader, surreptitiously gathering information about ourselves and our planet, sinisterly unwilling to share knowledge of its technology.

Of course such preparation for an invasion is unlikely, given there hasn't been one in the 85 years since it landed, coupled with their apparent inability to cross the vast interplanetary distance with anything more massive than a nanoship.

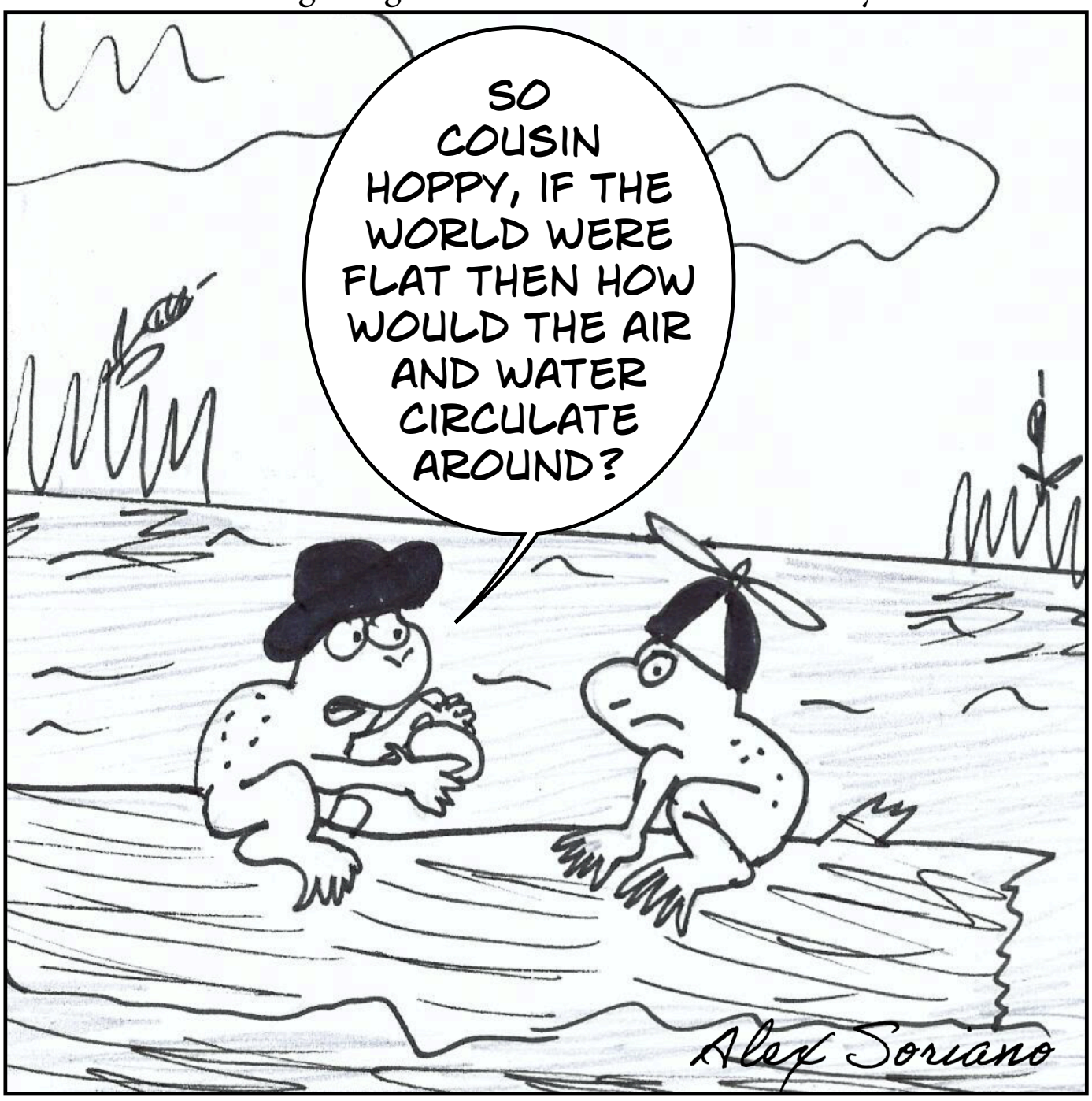
Alas, we are not so different from the robin. Evolutionary predisposition rules the day: fear of loss outweighs expectation of gain.

There is no basis for knowing the response of the unfathomable device to various methods of destruction, so the needle is placed in a rocket and blasted into space.

In the movies, Man is either invaded or saved in his first alien encounter. The former has not occurred and we have quashed any chance of the latter.

Today out past Pluto drifts the only alien hardware ever discovered by Earth species *Homo Sapiens*, afloat in a universe of missed messages.

The Observant Frog's Log by Alex Soriano

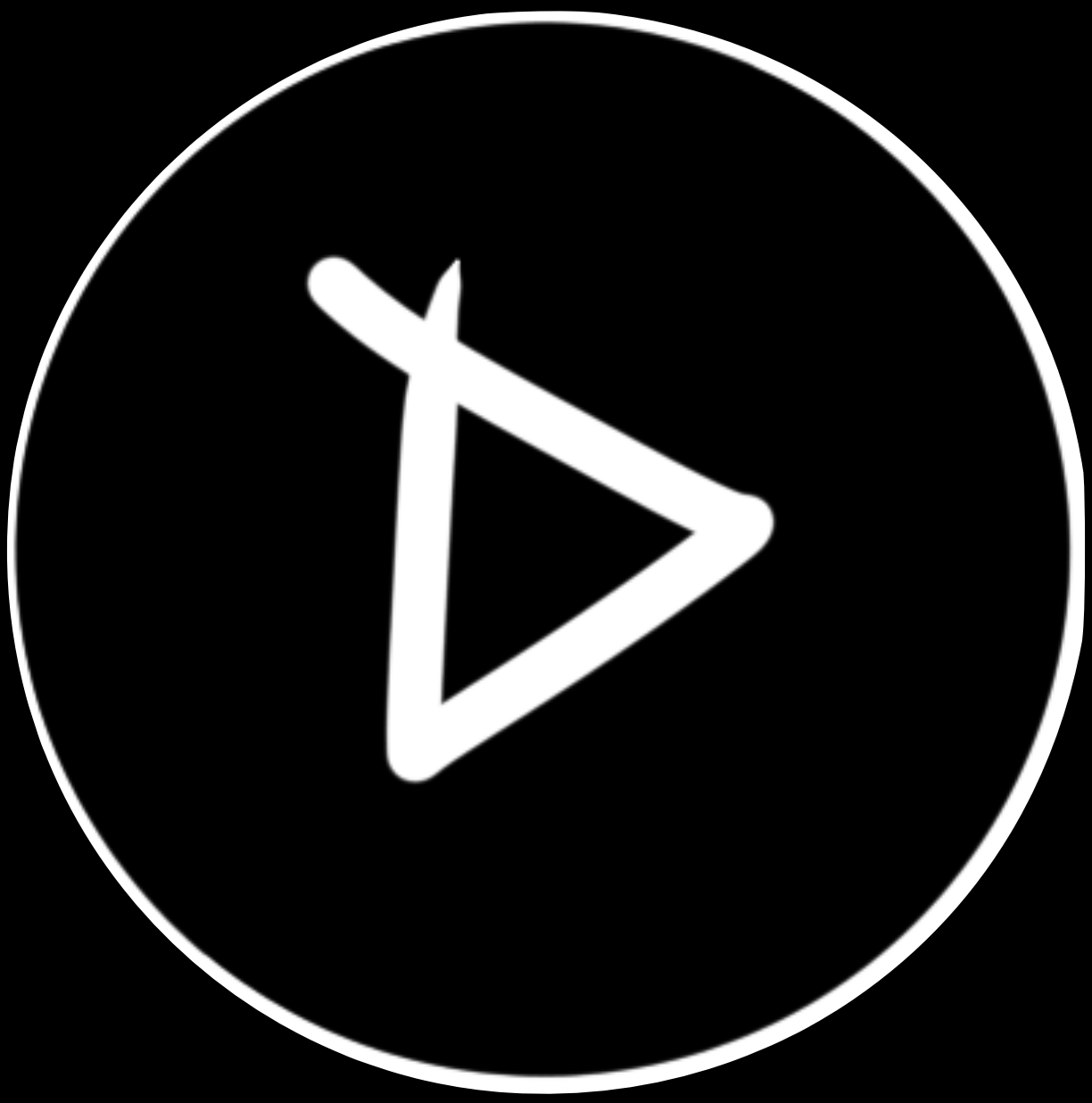


42

Kit Terrel

Sad song
Falcon atop a hill
Fallen upon a diamond in the rough
Far far away from here, I see the sky

Rainbow stew
It's alright
It's going to be okay
Far far away from here, you will fly



url: minimag.press
subs: minimagsubmissions@gmail.com
substack: minimag.substack.com
twitter: @minimag_lit
insta: @minimag_write
book: https://a.co/d/8bTfxxI

"ceramic tile shades at the local E.R." by Sophia Pan
Insta: @potatoir
Website: https://sophiapan.carrd.co/

"Slim" and "Around" by Alex Soriano
Insta: @comic_al
Website: https://comicscartoonshumor.com/

"Needle" by Len Slatest
Email: disputedunit@gmail.com

"42" by Kit Terrel

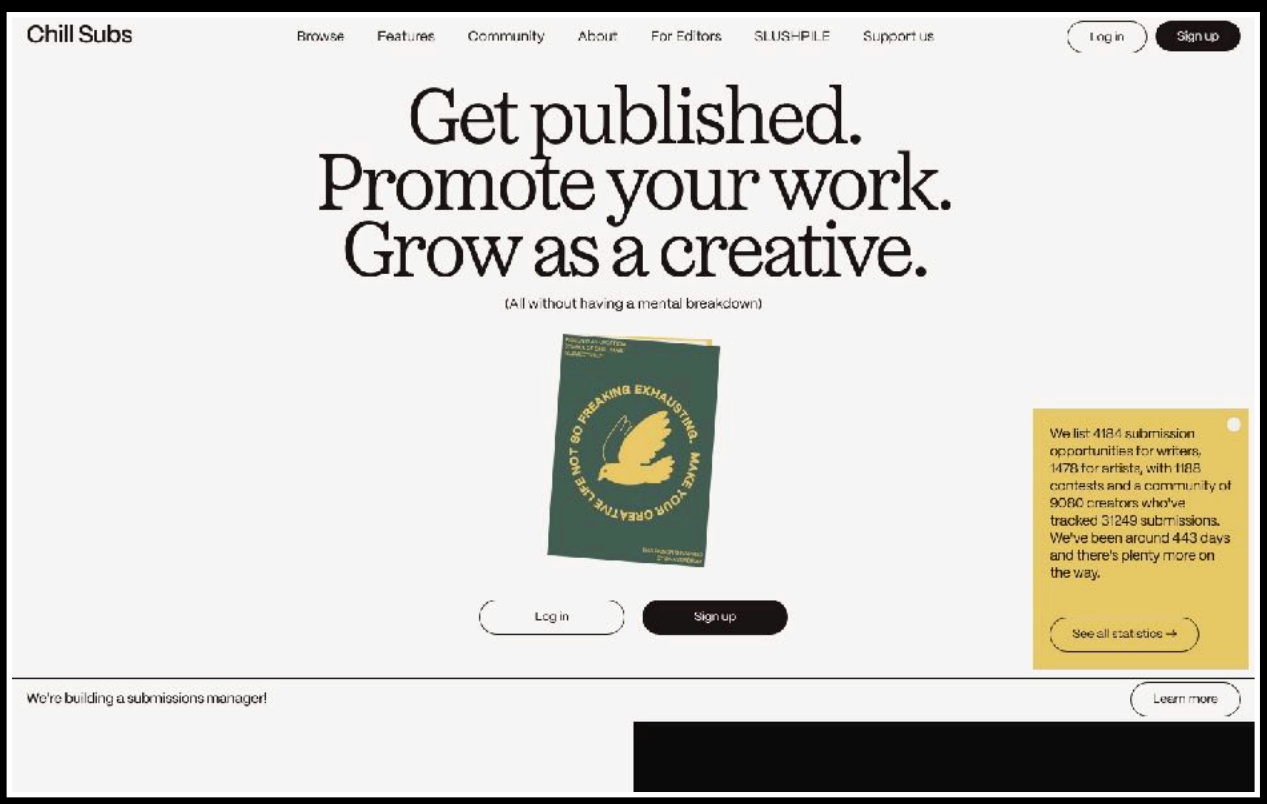
ISSUE195 edited and ai art by airport

ads

click here
(amazon)

OSp

ads



click here
(website)