
Hi again, Tom Bubul here, an artist who still has nothing to do with comics, with:

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Every day the artists try to have good ideas. They drink water, eat, use the baño several times, and go to bed. One painter has good ideas only when he's thinking nothing. He only thinks nothing when unhurriedly showering, walking someplace, or falling asleep.

The painter has a reptilian alertness that catches good ideas arising from thinking nothing. This alertness is also subtle enough not to disturb the "thinking nothing" itself; the painter considers it a "background process." It signals good ideas by inducing a sensation that feels like a light material moving across his face. He has bad ideas and jutting thoughts constantly, but the sensation of light material on his face only accompanies good ideas. He knows that when he has the feeling of a good idea emerging from thinking nothing, he should write it down. This is how his primary "foreground process"—making paintings—begins.

When he finishes his night's work, he cleans up, turns out the lights in the studio, and walks across the apartment's dark floor. He brushes his teeth and drinks water, picturing the paintings on the other side of the apartment, hanging in the dark. He imagines them "thinking nothing."

He takes off his clothes and lies down, picturing his toothbrush inside the medicine cabinet. Will it touch his teeth a hundred more times? Maybe, then he'll get a new one. Some paintings in his flat file haven't been seen by human eyes for months, or years. Does this mirror the life of the toothbrush? He pictures the toothbrush thinking nothing in the medicine cabinet, or maybe thinking about how many more times it must touch his teeth before it can truly think nothing. Is it a relief to be in the flat file, off the wall, or disposed of when exhausted? No, but it's a transition...

Thoughts like these occur continuously to him without order or time, like insect sounds. He can focus his mind to follow any of these thoughts further, but he mainly accepts them as "background noise." He knows they are not good ideas—just the score to his light insomnia, which primarily manifests via physical compulsions related to rolling over in bed. His desire in bed is to think nothing, finish rolling, and start sleeping. He focuses on the image of his studio chair and desk, twenty feet away in the dark apartment, then begins to think about the work, at first as an image of a person running up and down stairs in full panic, then calmly as the image of his closed laptop. Then his body commences the process of rolling over.

He never thinks about or anticipates having good ideas. If he has one as he is thinking nothing, prior to falling asleep, he must interrupt his compulsive rolling process to write the good idea down, or risk losing it.



His body's process for rolling over to fall asleep typically looks like this:

He gets into bed and curls up on his side with his arms pressed across his chest. Then he rolls over and straightens his spine and legs, and extends his lower arm straight toward the top of the bed, turning his wrist so that the top of his hand presses against the wall. Then he rolls over a second time, and stretches his legs into a wide V, flattening both arms against the bed, as if clinging to a sheer surface. Then he rolls over a third time, and tucks the bottom arm under a pillow, which he holds under his neck like a violin, and his legs and spine relax into roughly the shape of bicycling with no hands. At this point he begins to fall asleep.

This is the basic mix, atop which sit these complicating factors:

- He prefers to begin by lying down on his left side, but he must begin by facing the nearest wall. Because he actively prefers to fall asleep on his right side, he has arranged his bed according to this preference, so that to get into bed and immediately face the nearest wall is also to lie on his left side, roll thrice, and fall asleep on his right. His preference in this regard is so strong—he believes sleeping on his left side contributes to anxious dreaming—that he only falls asleep on his left side in situations where he cannot or is otherwise unwilling to change the orientation of a bed in a room that would require him to begin the process of falling asleep by lying on his right, so as to face the nearest wall... or when the process of rolling is mitigated by some distraction such that he rolls an even number of times.

- If there is sound in the place where he is falling asleep, he will work to remove it, or will limit it with a strong preference for keeping it at his feet, so that from a lying position, the sound seems to come from below his feet rather than from above his head. In some cases (such as with irregularly recurring bell-like sounds, for instance glasses on a shelf vibrated by truck traffic) he will sleep with his head at the foot of a bed, beginning the rolling on his right side against preference, in order to have the sound “below” him.

- If he had coffee after 7pm, he will have to repeat the complete process of rolling over at least five times in a state of near constant distraction via high volume “background noise” thinking.

- If he has been drinking alcohol, he falls asleep immediately but without rolling, and will wake dehydrated and unrested several hours later, at which time he will have to begin the process of rolling, and with his restful sleep functionally beginning only from that point.

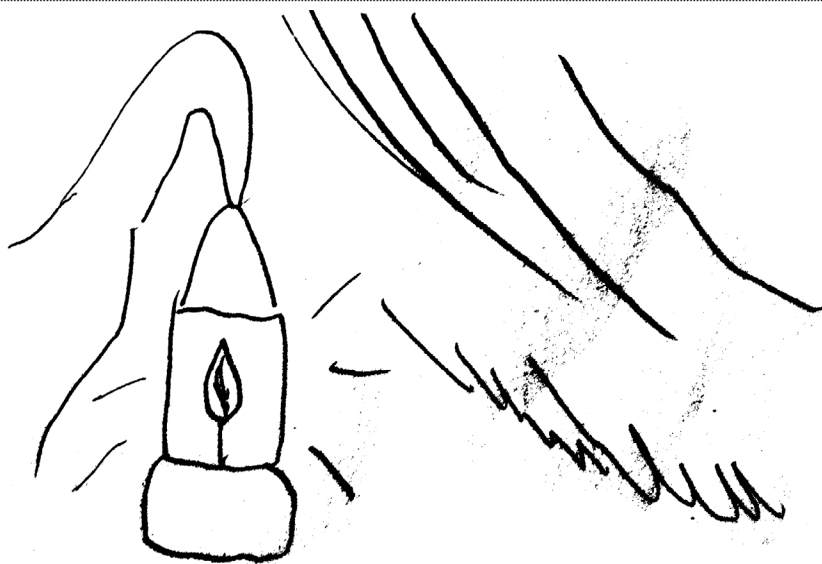
- Finally, he can't control the period of time that separates each roll. He may lie on his left side to start for as much as an hour before rolling over for the first time. Or he may do the first two rolls quickly and then a long half-sleeping interval may pass before the third. He does not tally the rolls as he rolls unless he is upset, in which case the tallied rolls do not count (and add to the risk that he will fall asleep on his left side, incurring anxiety dreaming). The rolls must be three unconscious rolls, each passing without remarked notice, for him to fall asleep.



Today he stopped drinking coffee at 4pm and is comfortable, warm, calm, and fed. He had one glass of wine much earlier in the night. He's basically pleased with the evening's painting progress, and not too absorbed in self-flagellating rumination on the enormity of injustice surrounding race, class, and gender in America, or these injustices' relationships to the ethical center of his middle class mid-Atlantic creative practice. He's lying on his left side, facing the wall. He pulls the sheet over his head and reaches the second roll in only a minute. But he has to get out of bed, have a small drink of water, and use the baño.

Then he gets back into bed again. He's thinking about the hundred drawings he just finished scanning, continuing the work of cutting selections from them by drawing complex paths with the Adobe Photoshop "pen" tool, in the manner of an obsessed Tetris player who, upon closing their eyes, can continue to see and manipulate falling blocks.

By the second roll, this work thought begins to loosen. Several Photoshop "smudge" brushes seem to act at once, moving in different directions with different levels of "hardness," turning a drawing into a distorted shape that ceases to resemble an image on a screen. He notices that new brush tools with different emoji as their representative icons have become available, and that an objective beyond the manipulation of images that must be accomplished through the manipulation of images has begun to assert itself. His sense is that a certain rotation of the distorted shape, achieved against the resistance of the rogue "smudge" brushes, would open the wall near his studio chair, revealing a new room in the apartment. As this objective becomes clear, and he shifts in preparation for his third roll, the Photoshop workspace seems to fill with cool, dry air.



He is still conscious enough at the second roll to enjoy distentions of thought into pre-sleep dreaming. He thinks of these distentions as “wildflowers.” In one such dream he faced thick trees at the end of a meadow, viewing them as an impassible 2D wall, like a painted aluminum cutout of “trees in the distance.” In the foreground he circled a patch of cardinal flowers growing on a grass mound. When circling the mound the flowers always showed the same two-dimensional face in the same flat vermillion, but without appearing to rotate, like 2D sprites in a 3D video space. When focusing on the flowers against the backdrop of “the trees in the distance,” the trees swarmed like a painting, but stilled completely when viewed directly. When he became aware of himself regarding the wildflowers as “a dream,” the environment collapsed back into thoughts. Remembering this the next morning, he wrote, “Distortions before sleeping are wildflowers,” surprised to realize by the feeling of a light material moving across his face that by solidifying the image in these terms he had come to think of it as “a good idea.”

In the room opened by successfully rotating the distorted image in wildflower Photoshop despite the intervening “smudge” brushes, he finds twelve bunk beds. The room is wainscoted with linoleum floors—inconsistent with his apartment. In one of the beds is a blonde boy in a sleeping bag, and though he can’t see it, the blonde boy’s presence indicates that there is a “useless” blanket made from scratchy human hair hidden somewhere in the room. The boy says, “Think about your face,” and he does, feeling the muscles in his reclining body’s forehead relax. But he cannot unconsciously think about his own face, and in having tricked himself into a form of wakeful self-awareness, understands that he has risked having to start the rolling process again. But before the image of the wainscoted bedroom collapses into thoughts, he thinks about the blonde boy’s face, and moves his own disembodied wildflower perspective closer and closer in toward it, as a clear jelly begins to cover the linoleum floor. Then he lies down in the jelly and rolls over.



The jelly moves across his face with the feeling of a good idea. Meanwhile, his face loses tension and his eyes feel like they're sinking into his head. The useless blanket seems to unfurl in its unseen place. The image of the good idea is a meteorological weather map of the United States, with animated red arrows curving upward out of the lower east coast toward the mid-Atlantic, describing one and then many simultaneous Nor'easters. There is no weatherperson forecasting but there are hovering bold sans-serif caps with red faces and black drop-shadows wavily moving along the arrows. He touches the map. It has the texture of linoleum, and he can feel that its reverse will have the texture of clean, brushed hair.

As he rolls for the third time, he understands that this image has suggested an idea which must be written down or potentially lost—he also knows that if he gets out of bed he will have to restart the process of rolling. But, regarding the image of the arrows on the weather map as “a wildflower,” and without thinking something as direct as “The idea is strong enough that I can write it down in the morning,” and while avoiding the mental search for his notebook and mechanical pencil in the dark apartment, he continues to feel the image of the arrows moving across the map as the sensation of a soft hand moving unendingly across his face, and soft human hair moving through his fingers like spring melt, and the recession of his eyes far into his tired body on the brink of shutdown, as more important than the need to get out of the bed and back into the world of the actual apartment to write down the idea these images and sensations represent here, in this calm moment where he is thinking nothing, and falling asleep.



He wakes up in a strange mood. In a dream he gravely insulted a room full of teens in a joinery demonstration at a woodworking class. The teens clouded over as they watched his mortise-cutting demonstration. He realized mid-strike that they had perceived the whole workshop as a kind of metaphoric endorsement for rape. One teen is staring at him with narrowed lips, wearing an all-white baseball cap. This teen's features are sharp and young; their friends share similar sharp looks. They call for a public apology, which he gives, sincerely and profusely in the dream. But the teen in the white cap does not accept, and he is forced to leave the woodworking class on foot, tramping into choked undergrowth, filled with shame.

Awake in his apartment, he drinks coffee. Then he spends the day organizing his studio, and later painting. By lunch he begins to think about the image of the arrows on the map, moving ever upward, describing the indelible feeling of some evanescent idea, a feeling which over time may become more important than the idea itself, delicious as it must have been to create such a powerful and memorable image and feeling on his face, though not so delicious as to remain as present as its image, or as the memory of its feeling, without the aid of having been written down. And for the rest of the day, he experiences the image of the good idea with a sense of loss.

Was it a good idea for a painting? Was it some connection to use in a poem, or tactic for a drawing? Was it something fun he realized he could do for his partner, on her birthday? Was it something he suddenly understood to be possible, which he had until that moment thought to be impossible? He does not know, but he keeps thinking about it. And he finishes his lunch, and goes back into the studio, where the other artists typically are too, at this time of day.

