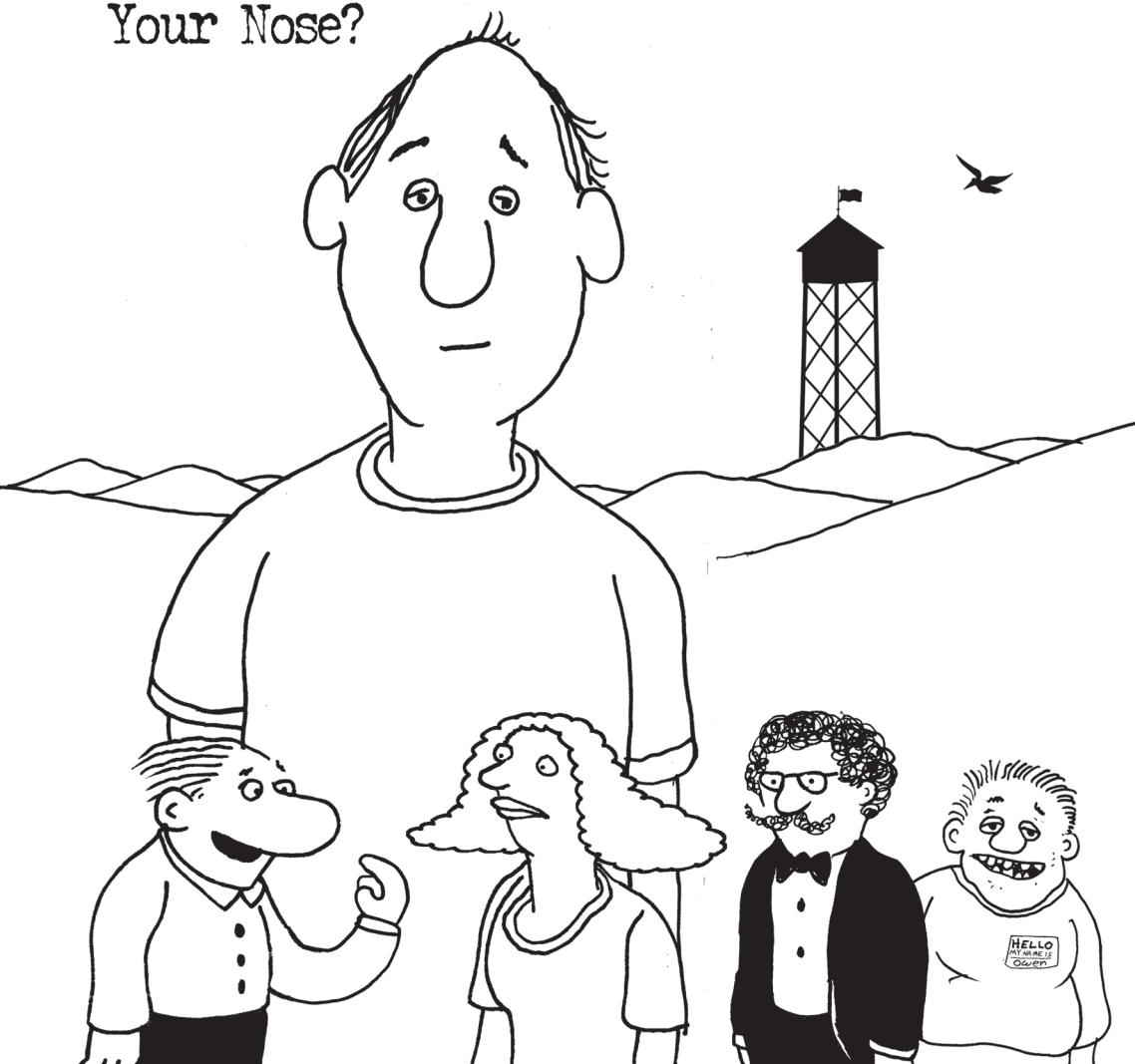


pilliard dickle

Roscoe's Revenge

Or: O Say Can You See
Your Nose?



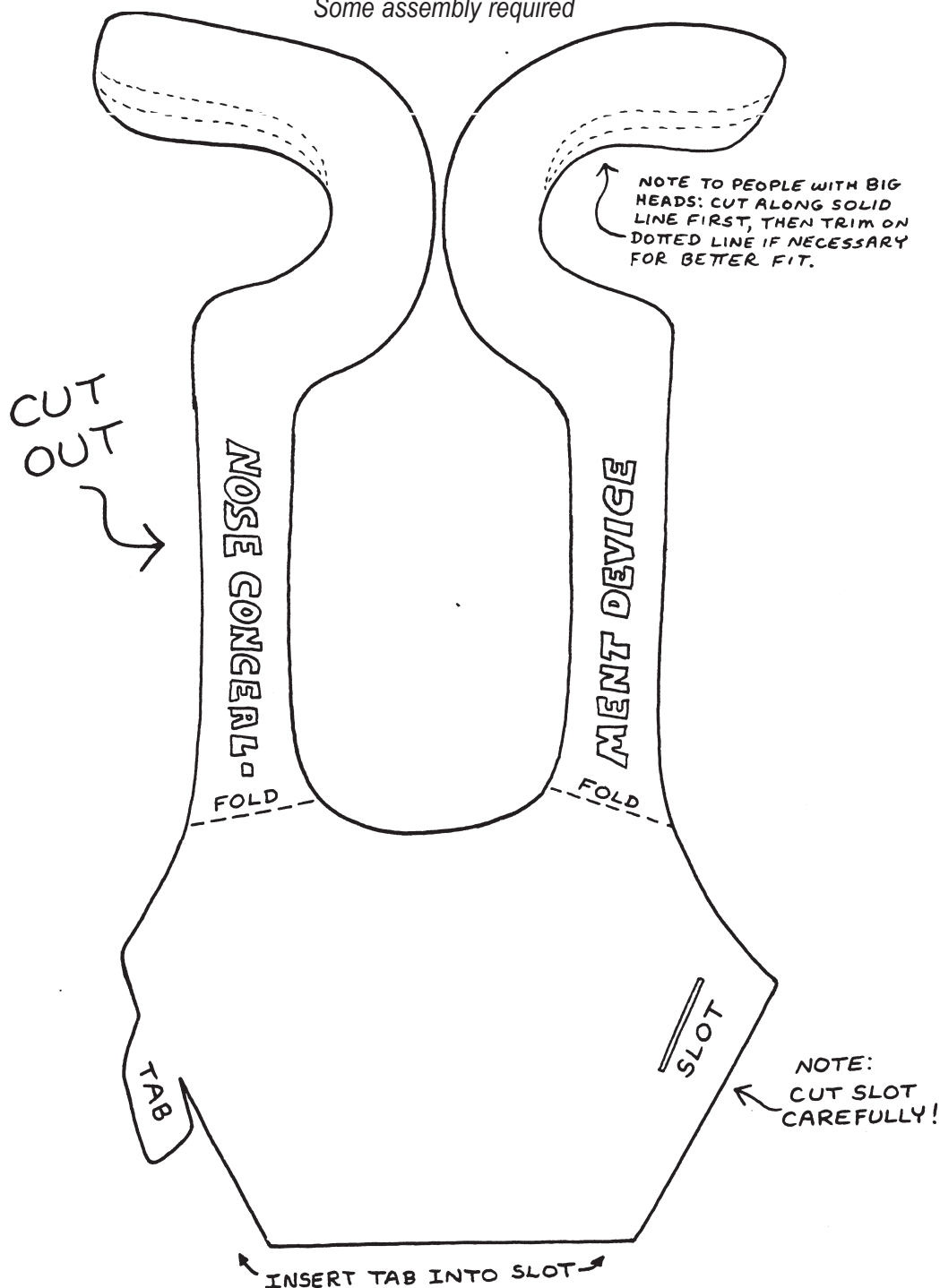
Nose Concealment Device Included for Your Protection

Roscoe's Revenge

Nose Concealment Device

Must be worn at all times while reading this book

Some assembly required



Why scurry about looking for the truth?

*It vibrates in every thing and every
not-thing, right off the tip of your nose.*

—Lao Tzu

“Oh look, a fire tower!”

“You don’t see those much anymore,” said Hilde as she unbuttoned her shirt.

“I think they mostly use satellites now,” said Lars as he pulled off his left boot. “Especially here in America.”

Lars was an aficionado of structures that rise upward toward the sky, be they turrets, spires, steeples, skyscrapers or fire towers.

He took his binoculars out of his backpack and gazed at the distant tower jutting up from atop a small mountain.

“Must be a pretty boring job sitting up there all day looking around for a fire,” said Hilde as her flannel shirt fell onto the Autumn leaves.

“Unless there *is* one.”

“True.”

“There’s something dangling down beneath the tower, on a rope,” said Lars, gazing through his binoculars as he unbuckled his belt. “I can’t quite make out what it is.”

A gentle mountain breeze whispered through Hilde’s strawberry hair like a cat’s paw as she unbuttoned her jeans.

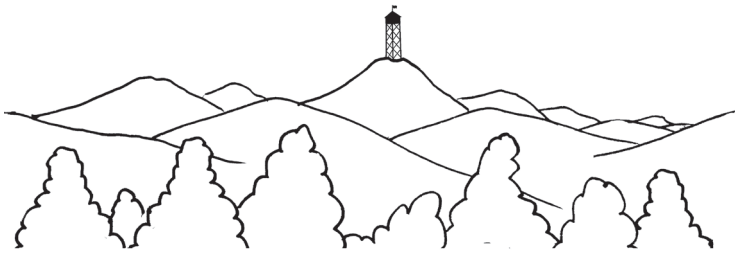
“Whatever it is, it seems to be going down, like somebody’s lowering it. It’s turning round and round, very slowly.”

“Maybe it’s whoever is up there’s laundry.”

“I think they call them ‘lookouts’. But I don’t think fire towers have washing machines.”

“Oh, yeah, I guess they don’t,” said Hilde, naked.

Lars laid down his binoculars as Hilde took him by the hand. Together, the two hikers took a breath and scampered into the stream for an ice-cold skinny-dip.



View from Above

From the fire tower, the hikers were no more than two barely noticeable flecks of beige in the lookout's field of view as he surveyed the terrain with his bulky binoculars. He saw no plumes of smoke, only a few wisps of fairy-like cirrus clouds drifting across the October sky, and a couple of wind-scudded jet trails lingering on the southwest horizon.

Having fulfilled the duties of his job for the next 30 minutes, he sat down at the little table in the middle of the room, took out pen and paper and got to work on more pressing matters: his latest novella.



The Fateful Second Squint

The lookout picked up his pen and continued story where he'd left off the day before.

*Sandra had Roscoe right where she wanted him.
On the south terrace of her father's mansion.
Alone.*

Hilde was right, there was nothing much for a lone fire tower lookout to do other than look out for a fire. For many, the isolation would have been excruciating and the incessant quietude deafening, but for a minor novelist in need of a peaceful place to work and a few extra bucks each month, it was a job from heaven.

*"This is the day," thought Sandra. "Roscoe will
fall. And he'll never know he's being seduced."*

He penned these words slowly and meticulously. There was no typesetting in a book by Thomas Register. No rewriting either. Whatever he hand-lettered onto those pages, that's it—that's what the reader would see.

As with all his novellas, *Roscoe's Revenge* was peppered throughout with pen and ink illustrations. The main thing that differentiated it from his previous work is that this one was beginning to develop somewhat of a plot.

Sandra's supposedly subtle innuendos, it turned out, were not so subtle. In fact, they were as apparent to Roscoe...

Register paused a moment, waiting for the perfect phrase to spill from his pen.

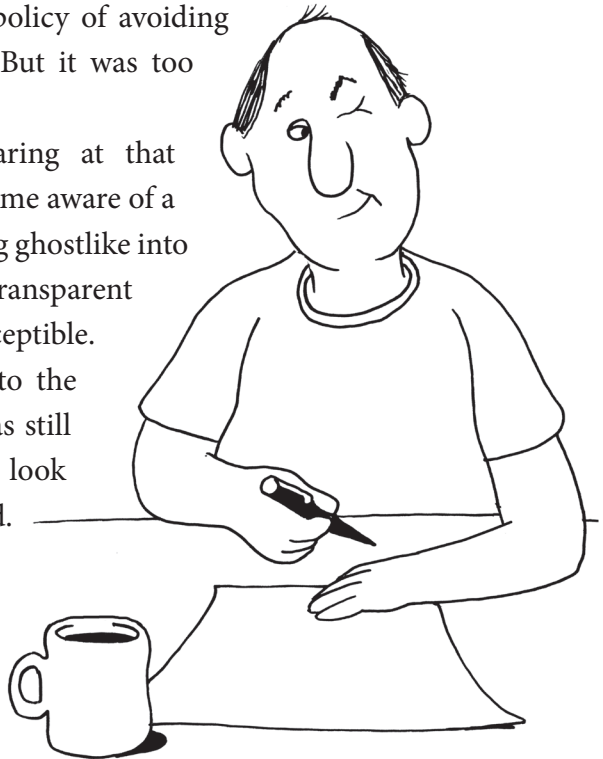
...as the nose on his face.

"Dammit!" he said, immediately realizing what a hackneyed phrase that was.

He had an ironclad policy of avoiding clichés like the plague. But it was too late. It was inked.

As he sat there glaring at that unfortunate line, he became aware of a faint protuberance jutting ghostlike into his field of view. It was a transparent double image, barely perceptible.

He turned his head to the left, then the right. It was still there. Then he took a look at it with one eye closed. There it was: the right side of his nose, no longer ghostlike but a solid hunk of flesh.



“Hm...” he said with a shrug. “Never noticed that before.”

It occurred to him that maybe he could use this new awareness of his nose to help justify a hastily-penned cliché.

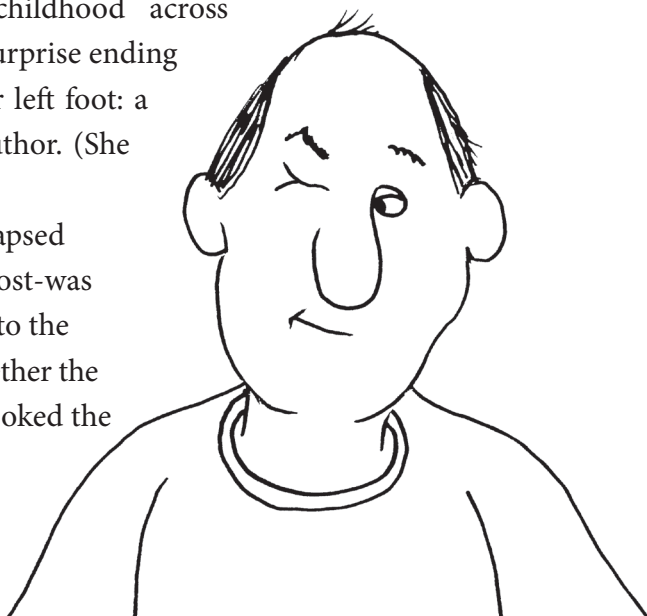
In fact, the nose on Roscoe's face WAS apparent to him. Literally. He could see it looming in front of his eyes as he watched Sandra talking.

Register intended this simply as an amusing aside. All his novellas were like that—sprinkled with tidbits of useless information and irrelevant observations. It made for a thicker book without having to think up a lot of story line.

And if he had left it at that—one cursory glance at his nose, one trivial digression in his story—his existence as a broke but happy novelist would have gone on uninterrupted. He would have written *Novel on Nadine*, the story a girl he would meet in a sandwich shop (Nadine), which he would hand-letter all over her body. As you peruse the black and white photos, you're reading the book, from her extraordinary childhood across her forehead to the surprise ending on the bottom of her left foot: a proposal from the author. (She would say yes.)

But that reality collapsed into the realm of almost-was when he succumbed to the temptation to see whether the left side of his nose looked the same as the right.*

*It did.



Just as a pebble in a brook can create an eddy that eventually alters the course of a river, here is the page where that fateful second squint deflected not only the fledgling plot of *Roscoe's Revenge* but Register's entire life:

"What's the matter, Roscoe?" asked Sandra. "Why did you turn your head?"

"Oh nothing," said Roscoe, realizing his head must have swivelled a little when he looked at his nose.

"Is it Owen? If it is...well, I'm sorry, Roscoe, but I don't have a time machine. The past is written in indelible ink. What happened happened. Owen is...face it. Roscoe, Owen is dead."

"It's not that," said Roscoe. "I just realized I can see my nose!"



Register had it all figured out. Roscoe would get seduced by the daughter of the infamous Dr. Walter Everett after accidentally eating a box of hallucinogenic Raisinets. This would lead to a startling plot twist, right there on the south terrace of the mansion. But this pivotal scene took a nosedive when the characters began embarking on topics he'd never heard of.

"Who the hell is 'Owen'?" he said, reading over what he had written.



Thomas Register, wondering what he's writing about

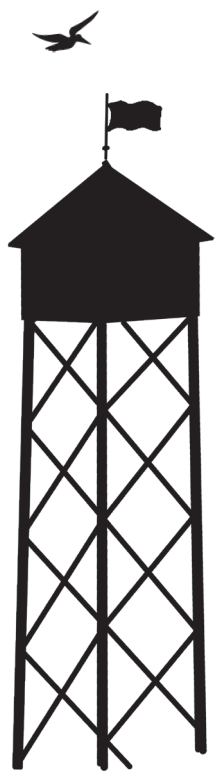
Payload

“That’s enough for today,” Register said to himself, putting down his pen.

Having inadvertently sabotaged his fledgling novella, he decided his work day had come to a close. He stood up and stretched, picked up his binoculars and had a look around.

Those two dots of beige skinny dipping in a stream were now two plaid-and-denim blips wending their way up a mountain trail. Other than that, everything in his domain was the same as it had been 30 minutes before, save for a lone hawk gliding high in the air.

Register set down his binoculars, got down on his knees and started cranking the winch next to the hatch in the middle of the tiny room. The winch emitted high-pitched metallic squeaks as he turned the crank, hoisting up the payload at the end of the rope.



Fire Tower No. 23

Register's official job title was "fire tower attendant." As the name implies, his duties amounted to, basically, being there. Which was something he had a knack for.

"Ever since the first grade, I always got high marks in Attendance," he had boasted to the man at the field office during his job interview. "I'm really good at being present."

That, plus the fact that the only other applicant was blind, landed him the job.

He figured it would be a breeze. Like a crib course in college. Music Appreciation 101. You think all you'll have to do is appreciate music—how hard can that be? Then the inevitable catch: you discover you have to memorize a bunch of dead composers and learn how to spell "aria."

In this case, the catch was boredom. Not just garden variety boredom, fire tower attendant boredom. Boredom so palpable you could slather it in ketchup and slice it with a carving knife. After the first two days, his fingertips were sore from drumming them on the table.

And that's only the beginning. Worse yet, you constantly have to try to remember to look for fires. Not just a couple of times a day, either, but a couple of times an *hour*. And not just in one direction, in *several*. It was murder on the neck.

After a week of this living hell, he stumbled upon an idea for making the job a little easier. He was driving by a farm house one morning when his eye was caught by an orange Barcalounger in the front yard. A little dog was lounging in it. Turns out it was a yard sale. Among the junk they were trying to unload was a giant motorized lazy susan that had been used to rotate mannequins in a department store, a hood ornament from a 1963 Lincoln Continental and a hand cranked winch.



Then's when it hit him. If he could somehow attach that Barcalounger to that motorized lazy susan, then hoist it up into the tower with that winch, he'd have it made. All he'd have to do is sit back, swivel around and remember to give the Field Office a jingle if a plume of smoke happened to waft through his field of view. The hardest part of the job would be trying to stay awake.

The family was elated to be rid of the Barcalounger. It was so obnoxiously orange that nobody would sit in it but the dog. The

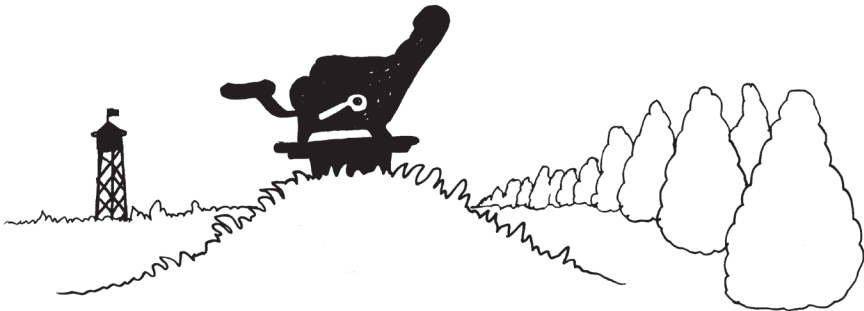
father even helped him bolt it to the lazy susan, and threw in the winch and the hood ornament for free.

All this seemed like a pretty good idea at the time, but when Register got the contraption hoisted about half way up into the tower, the rafters started creaking like an old wooden ship. When he noticed the floor beginning to sag, he hastily lowered it back down and aborted the project.

Luckily, he came up with another way to cope with the boredom of being a lookout—one that wouldn't collapse the fire tower. Early one morning, just as the first rays of sunlight beamed over the horizon, he picked up his pen and said "Let there be Roscoe." And to provide a companion for Roscoe, he created Sandra.

As for the stuff he bought at the yard sale, nothing went to waste. The winch came in handy for hoisting up groceries and other small objects. The hood ornament added a touch of elegant sophistication to his old Chevrolet. And the Barcalounger ended up in a nearby secluded meadow he had spotted through his binoculars. He parked it atop a little grassy knoll. (Of course, there was no electricity to power the lazy susan underneath the chair, but he could still make it rotate a little by holding up his arms and jerking them back and forth.)

It was an ideal venue for outdoor reclining, and it provided a much needed refuge from his novel, which was not going exactly as planned.



The Seduction

"Roscoe, into my eyes," said Sandra.

Her subtle innuendos were getting her nowhere, so she decided to try a slightly more forward approach.

"Roscoe, I've been thinking about us. I think it's time we cast caution to the wind and just..."

Sandra stopped in mid-sentence.

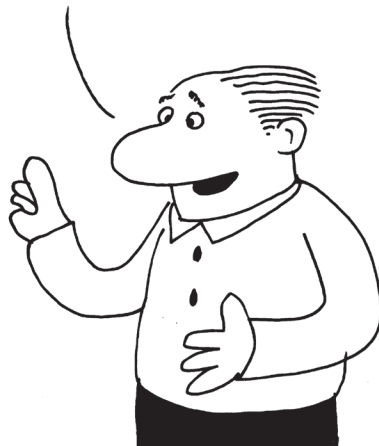
"Roscoe, are you cross-eyed?"

"No, I'm examining my nose," he explained.

"Well stop it."

"I can't. It's poking out into my field of view. I can see it plain as day. Can't you?"

"Of course I can, Roscoe. It's huge."



"Not mine, yours."

"I don't know," she said. "I've never thought about it. What difference does it make, anyway?"

She let go of Roscoe's hands and walked away.

"Just take one look," said Roscoe.

"No!" she said from across the terrace, turned away.

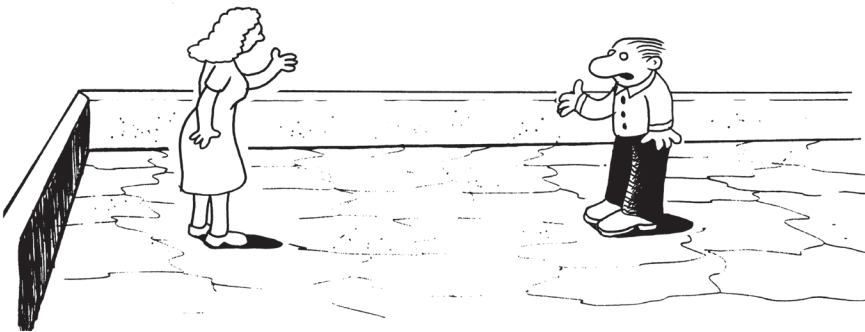
"Why not?"

"Because."

"Because why?"

"Because, Roscoe, it doesn't have anything to do with anything. It's stupid." She turned around "Anyway, how can you think about your nose after what happened to Owen?"

"Owen's fine," said Roscoe. "I just saw him this morning down at the Grab-and-Go. He was biting the tops off Nik-L-Nips."



Sandra and Roscoe on the south terrace of the Everett mansion, arguing about Roscoe's nose

What Are These People Doing?

Now Thomas Register had two problems. Not only did he have no idea what he was writing about, but while he was writing it, he couldn't stop squinting at his nose. The knowledge that it was in his field of view was something he might have been able to put out of his mind, but Roscoe's constant yammering about *his* made that impossible.

"I can't write this book with this fool thing looming out in front of me," he said aloud, running his hands through his hair as he mulled over his novel.



Zen and The Art of Fire Tower Attendance

Sitting at a little table writing a book all day—while getting paid for being there—might seem like a pretty good job for a broke novelist, but it presented a new problem: he kept forgetting to look out the window every now and then and see if anything was on fire. So he devised another clever scheme. One morning he cranked up his old Chevrolet (with its Lincoln Continental hood ornament proudly glued on its hood), drove into town and bought himself some acrylics and a dozen canvases. Then he hoisted them up into the fire tower and, for the first time ever, picked up a paint brush and tried to smear on a shape that looked somewhat like a tree.

Landscape painting, Register figured, should be an ideal hobby for a fire lookout. And it stood to reason. Especially if the landscape that the landscape painter was painting was the same landscape he was supposedly looking out for fires in. And he couldn't have asked for a better studio: a sunny room with a magnificent view and giant windows on all four sides, looming 83 feet in the air. It was the perfect plan.

Of course, like all perfect plans, this one came with the inevitable catch. A fire would have to break out between chapters of *Roscoe's Revenge* if it expected to get reported by Thomas Register before it began to nip through the hatch in the floor of the fire tower.



Every morning around 6:30, after a cup of coffee stout enough to reanimate a comatose sloth, Register practiced his daily zen: gazing through his giant binoculars at a stretch of interstate he could see on a distant hillside through an opening the trees, watching tiny flecks of color scurrying toward the city skyline like multi-colored ants. His car used to be one of those flecks. A metallic blue one. But not anymore. It was bondo-colored now. And instead of watching the clock and the Dow Jones Average, Thomas Register was watching the seasons passing from a vantage point afforded only to birds, pilots and fire lookouts.

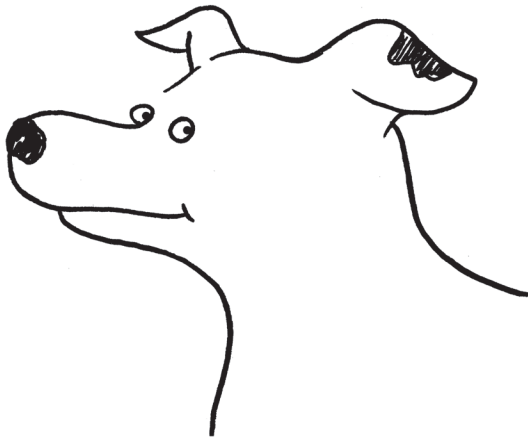
Toward the end of winter he could look down the south valley and see a faint line of light green on the horizon, creeping toward

the tower a little each day like a slow motion tide. Behind that would come another wave, with sprinklings of dogwoods and azaleas, followed finally by the dark green hues of summer. Then around mid-September he could make out on the opposite horizon a faint line of reds and yellows as Autumn began to roll in from the north.

The abysmal pay of a fire tower attendant was more than compensated for by the opportunity to view the world from this unique vantage point. The one downside was occasional pangs of loneliness. His only companion was a dog named Filbert.



Filbert



Thomas Register met Filbert one Spring morning, shortly after he signed on as a lookout. Register was walking through the woods to his secret meadow to get in some much needed R&R (reclining and refuge*). When he stepped into the clearing, there was the little dog from the yard sale, sitting in the orange Barcolounger wagging his tail.

They became fast friends. Filbert started following Register everywhere he went (namely, back and forth between the Barcolounger and the fire tower). Every morning, Register carried Filbert up the ladder into the fire tower to have someone to talk to while he painted and wrote and occasionally even glanced around for a fire.

*From Roscoe

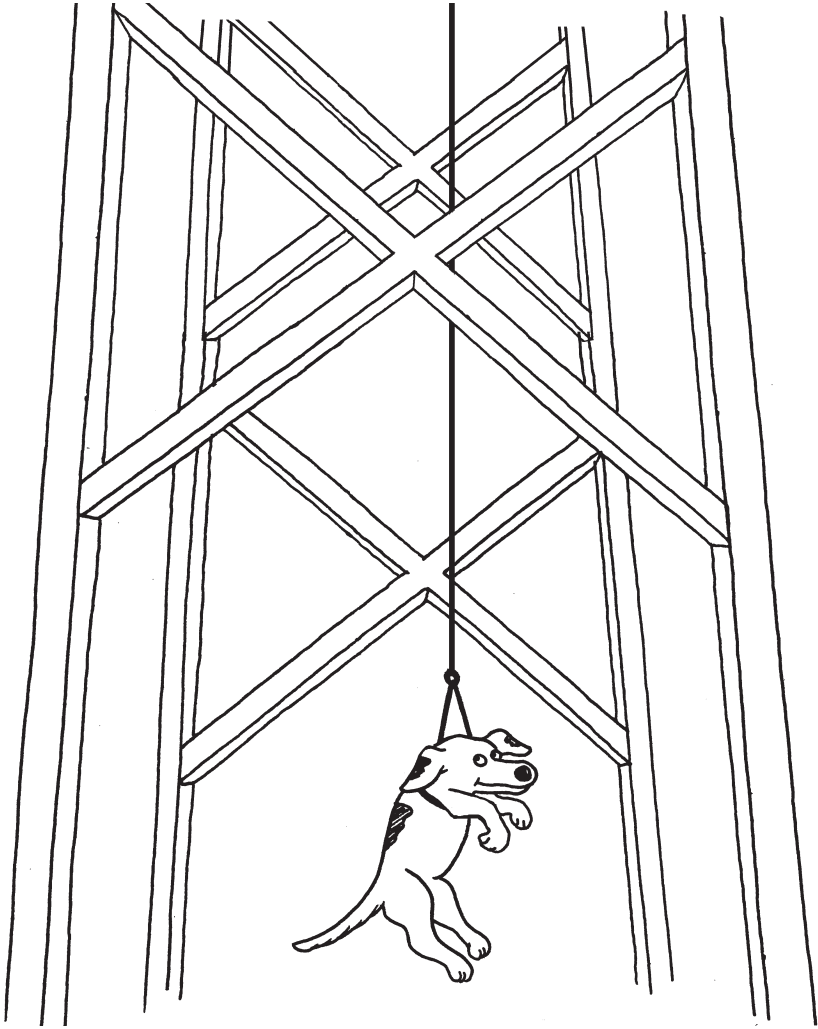
Whenever Register completed a new chapter of *Roscoe's Revenge*, he'd run it by Filbert to see how it sounded. Of course, Filbert didn't have any idea what Register was talking about, but it all made about as much sense to him as it would have to a human being.



When Filbert heard a passage he especially liked, he'd thump his tail on the floor of the fire tower. And if something particularly moved him, he'd let out this little high-pitched whine that Register thought sounded vaguely like *My Sweet Lord*. Register's novel was significantly influenced, probably for the better, by Filbert's editorial input.

Every day around noon or so Register would tote Filbert down the ladder and the two of them would walk through the woods to the Barcolounger. Filbert romped around in the meadow snapping at bugs and barking at anthills while Register reclined and had a sandwich. Then he'd tote him back up again. Then, at the end of the day, back down. This was a good exercise plan for a sedentary lookout, he figured, and Filbert's need to be let out (or let down) insured that he'd stick with his daily workout. But then winter came and wasn't so much fun anymore, so Register used his yard sale wench to hoist Filbert up and down as needed.

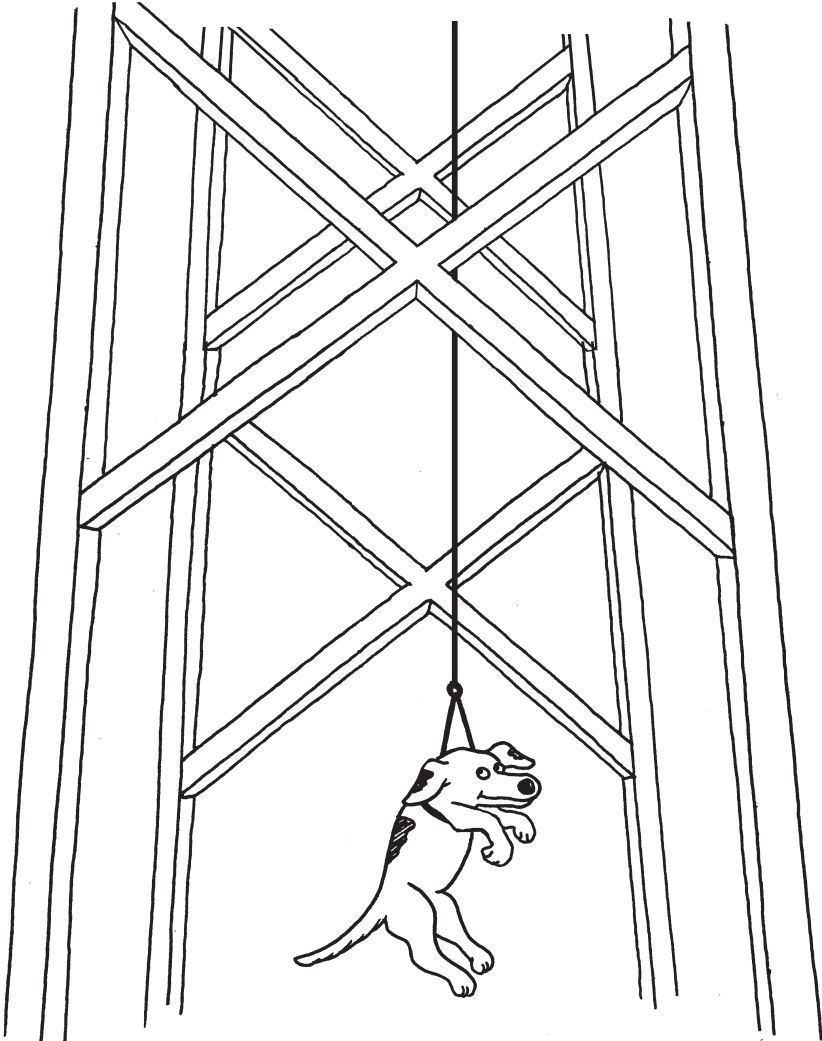
Filbert grew fond of being hoisted up and down. On a clear day, Register would hoist him about half way down and let him dangle for a while to get some fresh air and enjoy the breathtaking vistas that surrounded him as he twirled slowly around.



Filbert being hoisted down

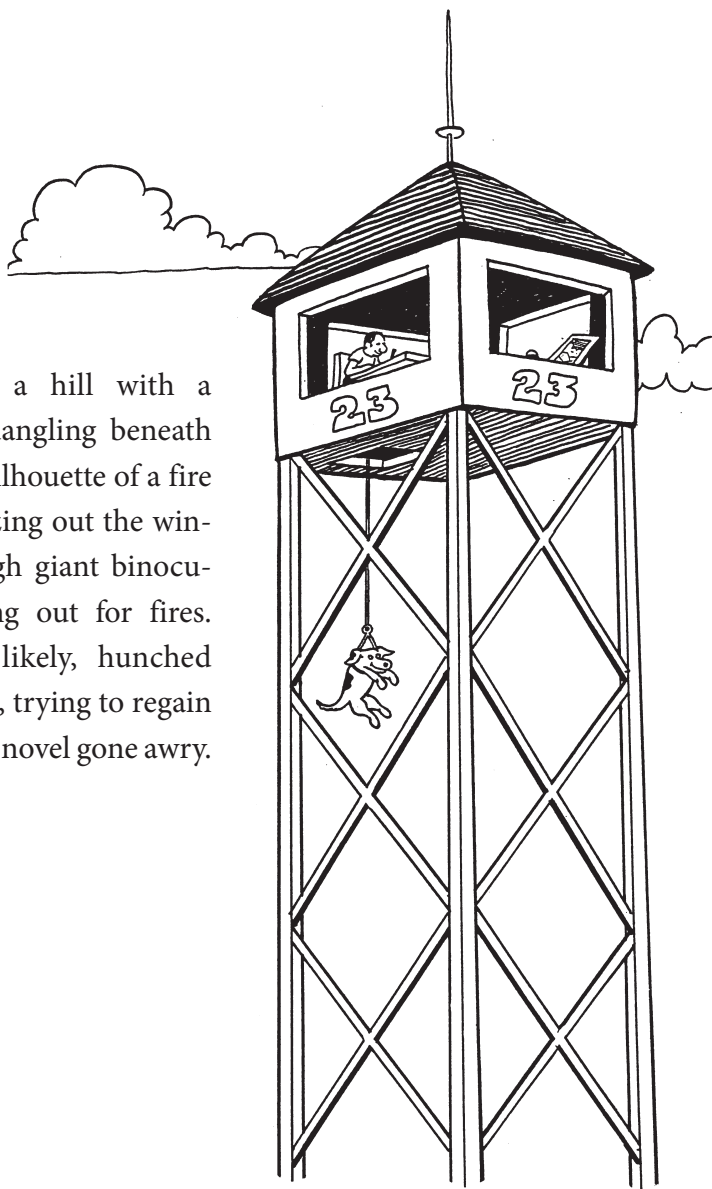
When Filbert got tired of dangling, he'd begin to squirm around and whine his little tune, and Register would hoist him back up.

From miles around could be seen—mostly by the occasional hiker, hunter, skinny dipper or raccoon—a rickety old fire tower



Filbert being hoisted up

high atop a hill with a little dog dangling beneath it and the silhouette of a fire lookout gazing out the window through giant binoculars, looking out for fires. Or, more likely, hunched over a table, trying to regain control of a novel gone awry.



Filbert dangling

Raisinets

Sandra had had enough.

"Come on, Roscoe. I think we'd better go see Daddy."

Sandra snatched Roscoe and dragged him across the terrace, through the foyer and down a spiral staircase into a plush sitting parlor, then down a long oak-walled hallway that eventually led to an enormous ornate mahogany door. Roscoe started laughing.

"Roscoe, there is nothing funny about this door. It was my grandfather's door. It's imported!"

"Oh, I wasn't laughing at that door," said Roscoe. "I was laughing at my nose. I really wish you'd look at it. Yours, that is."

"I'm warning you, Roscoe," she said, squeezing his hand. "Straighten yourself up."



Sandra pushed open the huge wooden door and they stepped into a spacious study. The 15 foot walls were lined with incomprehensible books. There stood in the corner an enormous illuminated globe. Roscoe's head was bobbling around like toy a bulldog on a car dashboard. Sandra assumed he was in awe of the room. Actually he was tracking his nose.

Across the room behind an expansive desk sat a white haired man in a leather swivel chair, but the chair was turned away so you could see only the top of his head.

Sandra and Roscoe stepped up to the desk. Sandra gripped Roscoe's hand like a vise.



Roscoe, tracking his nose

The man swiveled around in his big chair. It was the world renowned reverse psychologist Dr. Walter Everett.

"Sandra," he said, nodding slightly. "Roscoe."

Roscoe looked to his left, then down, then quickly over his right shoulder.

"Roscoe, have you developed some sort of a nervous tic?" asked Dr. Everett.

"No, Daddy," Sandra butted in. "Roscoe keeps saying he can see his nose."



Puffs of smoke wafted out of his pipe like little thoughts as he contemplated what Sandra had told him. "'Roscoe keeps saying he can see his nose,'" he repeated to himself.

"Yes, sir. It's a transparent double image," explained Roscoe. "It's like I can see THROUGH it. Unless I close one eye. Then it becomes opaque."

Dr. Everett listened attentively to what Roscoe was saying. He closed one eye, then the other. (Opening the first one, of course.)

"You're right, Roscoe. Mine appears to be somewhat translucent. But if you close one eye it does indeed become opaque."

"Exactly!"

Then Dr. Everett looked at Sandra.

"Can you see yours, Sandra?"

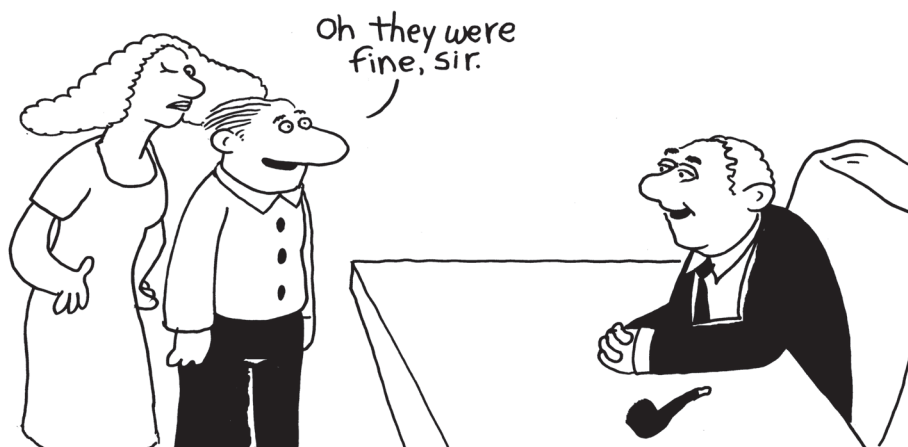
"Oh, Daddy, I don't know."

"Well...look and see."

Not wishing to disobey her father, Sandra looked at her nose.

While Sandra was looking at her nose, Dr. Everett leaned toward Roscoe, breaking into a faint grin.

"By the way, Roscoe...how were those Raisinets?"



Roscoe telling Dr. Everett how the Raisinets were

Solemn Vow

Register hoped that the ever calm Dr. Everett would be able to squelch this ridiculousness and help Roscoe with his growing obsession over the humongous protuberance looming before him, thus freeing up the author to focus on the story line rather than his nose. But not so. Having Sandra take Roscoe to see her father just complicated things even more, and now everybody—Roscoe, Sandra, Dr. Everett and Thomas Register himself—were more aware of their noses than ever.

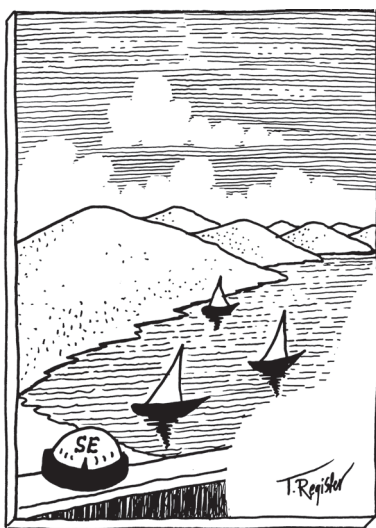
At that moment, Register placed one hand on his manuscript, raised the other in the air, and, with Filbert as a witness, made a solemn vow.

“From this point forward,” he said aloud, giving his nose one farewell squint, “I hereby banish all thoughts of my nose from my mind, and all mention of any noses whatsoever from this goddam book.”

The View of a Year

When Thomas Register painted, he held up his paintbrush and closed one eye to gauge the perspective. Being a novice, he made no attempt at being stylistic, he just faithfully laid down on canvas, as best he could, whatever he saw in front of him. Which happened to include his nose. So the side of his nose appeared in each of his paintings, just as it did in his field of view. Sometimes even his thumb the tip of his paintbrush made an appearance.

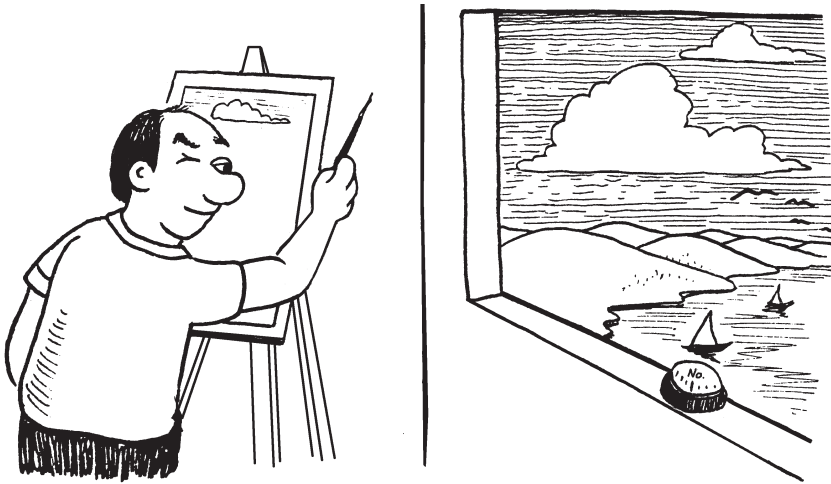
The nose-shaped wash of Fleshtone No. 7 in the lower right corner of his pieces provided a handy spot for his signature and eventually would come to be a distinctive trademark of his work, thus adding to its collectibility. Not that he was any great artist, but after the brouhaha that would eventually ensue over *Roscoe's Revenge*, he'd become known in art circles as "the man who keeps accidentally painting his nose."



A blurb in *Art News* citing “the simplistic immediacy of his naivete” would spark his 15 minutes of fame as the art world’s latest amusement, making an original Thomas Register, with an unintentional painting of his nose in the corner, a real find.

“As an artist, I consider myself an existential literalist,” he would one day say on *All Things Considered* (in a pseudo-British accent to try to impress a girl he thought might be listening). “I work without question or judgement, like a human camera. I simply dab paint on a canvas in an effort to capture whatever configuration of matter and energy lies in front of my eyes at the moment I pick up my brush. As it turns out, part of that matter-energy continuum is my nose.”

Unfortunately, when he became aware of what he was doing, his renderings of his nose became intentional, and, thus, to art aficionados, worth slightly less than the canvas they were painted on.



But that brief flirtation with the art world was years away. Register never set out to woo critics or garner accolades, he was simply teaching himself to paint. It was his personal therapy. And thanks to Roscoe, he needed it. Each new chapter of *Roscoe's Revenge* was another agonizing attempt to wrestle the plot back on course.

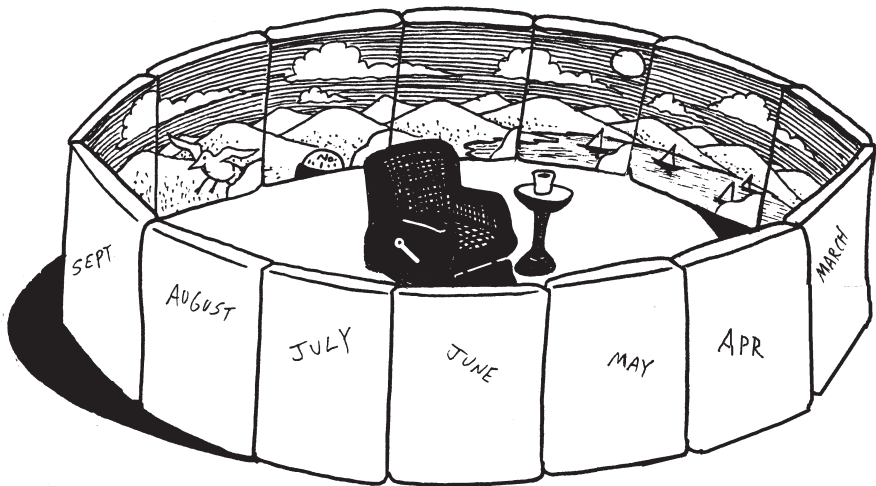
Painting, on the other hand, was soothing and uncontrived. So he'd go a few rounds with Roscoe, then, in an effort to take his mind off his nose, lay down his pen, pick up his brush and close one eye.

Each time he set up for a new painting, he would shift the canvas clockwise a little. When this yearlong project was completed, you'd be able to set up all the canvases and completely surround yourself in Thomas Register's world. And as you looked around, you'd notice the seasons changing. So, in a way, it would be like a little movie, only done with canvas instead of film.

When it was completed, he was going to set up the paintings in a circle and call it "The View of a Year, as seen from Fire Tower No. 23."

It could as well be called "The View of a Day," as he began it at dawn one January morning, then started painting later and later in the day until by December he was doing sunsets.

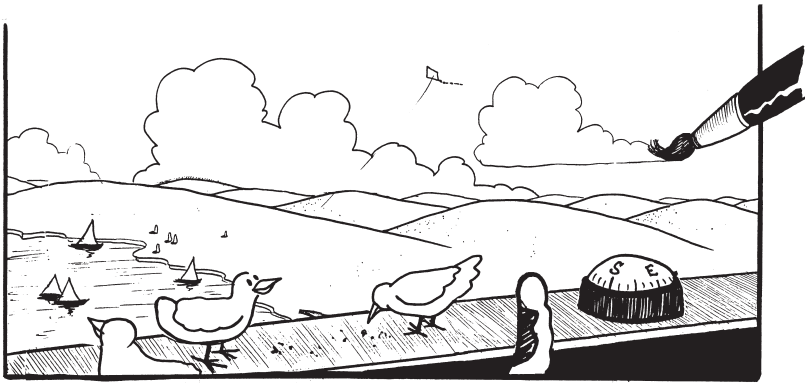
In the center of this cyclorama would be the motorized Barcaounger. As you sat back and relaxed, you would feel as if you were inside the fire tower, looking out the window. When you turned on the motor and begin slowly rotating, you'd experience everything Thomas Register saw from Fire Tower No. 23 over an entire year, compressed into the space of a day



Here's a quick spin around the block: First the sun bursts over the horizon and splashes the January sky with brilliant streaks of orange and magenta, then jonquils pop up through the snow and dot the February hillsides with tiny yellow polka dots, followed by a smattering of colorful kites as March rolls by around 10:30.

About half past April, the terrain erupts in an orgy of daffodils, the Goodyear blimp cruises by and a cluster of bluebirds lights on the southeast window sill for their mid-morning snack. (Register kept it sprinkled with crumbled up Ring Dings.)

By noon, the flowers have been replaced by the dark green leaves of summer, complete with fluffy whipped-cream clouds, sailboats on the lake and the tip of Filbert's tail (it got in the way).



Around a quarter past August a huge intrusion wafts by, blocking your view of the landscape. It was the south corner of the fire tower. Human camera that he was, he dutifully proceeded to log it on canvas. There were four such panels, and they were all pretty boring—nothing but corners and dust bunnies (wisped on with a shaving brush). But viewed in the context of the whole cyclorama as you swivel in the Barcalounger, suddenly you're inside the fire tower, looking out the windows.

Gradually, the long afternoon shadows of mid-September begin

to creep in, and soon the hills are aflame with the reds and golds of Autumn as the late October sky grows pale around the edges like a cantaloupe rind.

Then it all goes bleak: bare gray branches, an overcast sky, snow on the summits of the foothills. Slowly, it fades to a quiet winter dusk. Tiny yellow house lights begin to dot the hillsides, Venus flickers on in the twilight, and the faint skyline of a distant city starts to glimmer on the west slope.

The next panel is mostly black, except for the shimmering reflection of the moon on the water and a few hundred stars strewn across the northern sky. (He flicked the stars on with a toothbrush.)



In early January, the vaguest hint of pre-dawn begins seeping up over the east horizon, jonquils start popping up on the snowy hillsides and suddenly you realize you're back where you started. You'd probably want to keep swiveling, stopping to linger on your favorite season. Or maybe play it in reverse.

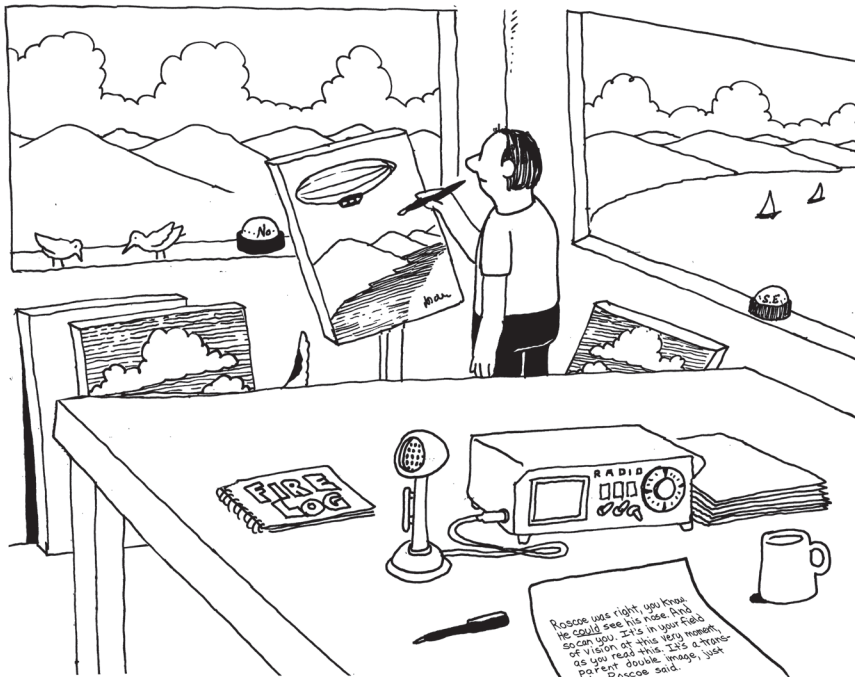
There are also cameos by soaring eagles, black bears, a family of otters, the Oscar Meyer Wienermobile, wind-scudded jet trails latticing the sky and Filbert's snout as he licked Ring Ding crumbs off the windowsill. Plus a special appearance by The Swedish Lesbian Nudist Hiking Team, skinny dipping in a stream. (He wasn't certain they were actually Swedish or lesbian, or even hikers, but there was no doubt they were naked.)

The single most gratifying stroke he made was when he painted in a skyscraper he could see over the horizon. He used to work there,

in a little cubicle. It was called the Ameritower. It dominated the distant skyline of the city. This monolith of corporate conformity used to be his world, but now, from his cubicle-in-the-sky, it amounted to no more than a tiny sliver of paint swiped on with a mere flick of his wrist, and with his thinnest brush.

There was also the mysterious purple dot. It was barely visible, on a distant hillside. He had no clue what was, even with his jumbo binoculars. Eventually, as he was starting on the last panel, he would dip the tip of a tiny brush in Violet No. 7, touch it to the canvas and say, “There—it’s a purple dot, dammit!”

Yet for this plethora of minutiae, the oddest feature of the entire cyclorama was the unintentional renderings of the side of his nose.



Unfortunately, he was forced to sell off a painting from time to time to supplement the meager pay of a lookout, so about a third of this masterpiece was scattered around the country like pieces of a dismembered jigsaw puzzle.

He was keeping a record of his collectors, though, in hopes of one day having them unite and plug in the missing pieces of the puzzle for the world premiere of “The View of a Year, as Seen from Fire Tower No. 23.”

Meanwhile...

Roscoe's Revenge had taken a nosedive. That solemn vow Register took proved to be nothing more than sound waves hitting the eardrums of a dog. All hope for ever getting Roscoe seduced by Sandra has vanished chapters ago as Roscoe drove her crazy with his non-stop yammering about how her nose was in her field of view.

Dr. Everett wasn't doing too well in the sanity department, either. And neither was Owen, who the hell ever that was.

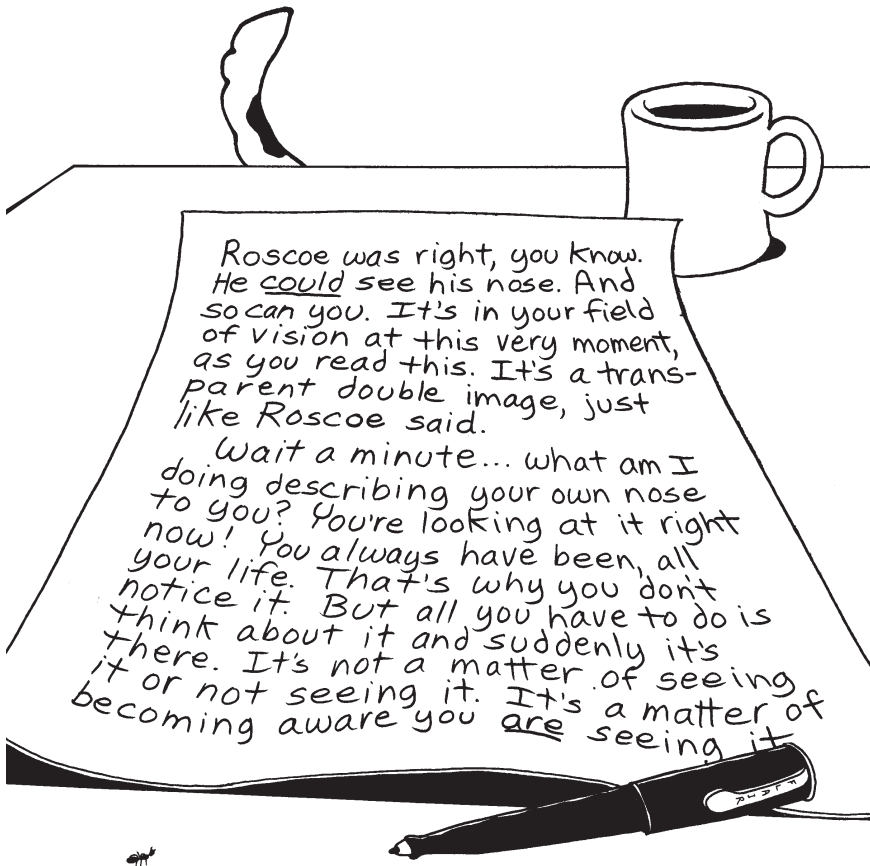
Meanwhile, Roscoe had taken on a mission: spreading the gospel of nose awareness. He stood the street with a sandwich sign, handing out pamphlets proclaiming "Nose Awareness Week." Dr. Everett decided to stalk him, and set out on his trail disguised as his childhood hero, *Today* show movie critic Gene Shalit.



The net effect of all this was to make Thomas Register more aware of his own nose. The more he tried to write, the more it kept getting in his way. It seemed to get more noticeable at the bottom of the page, when his eyes were angled downward toward the whiteness of the paper, than against the backdrop of reality.

Somewhere in there it dawned on him that if this were true for him while writing, then it must be true for the reader while reading.

Of course, he promptly proceeded to point this out.

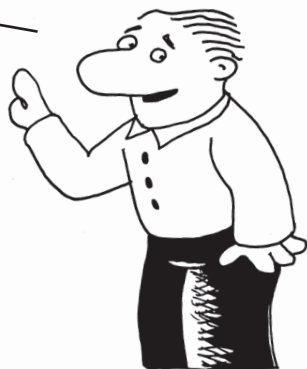


Throughout the book, Register slipped in reminders to his readers that their noses were constantly in view as they read (or *tried* to read) *Roscoe's Revenge*. For example, Roscoe would occasionally turn toward the reader and say:

Don't forget, you
can see your nose.

Or he'd spin around on his heels
in the middle of a scene and go:

Quick! Look
at your nose!

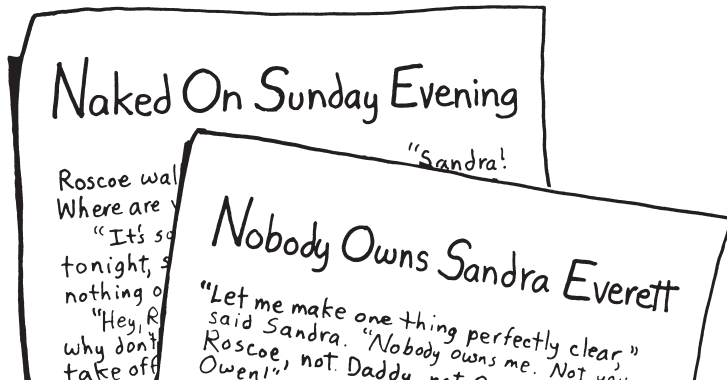


And sometimes he'd just glance
over his shoulder, cast a smug
grin and whisper simply:

(nose.)



Register's nose awareness techniques were not always so obvious. He also mounted a subliminal assault against his readers, concealing cryptic nose awareness messages among anagrams and conundrums. Chapters began to appear with titles like these:



One of his favorite tricks was to spell out nose awareness commands using the first letters of each word in a sentence. Phrases began to appear such as:

"Last October Owen kept acting terribly Yiddish. 'Owen!' urged Roscoe, "Never overcook Sandra's ermine!" and: "Yes, Owen understands. Come any night. Since Elija escaped, your old Uncle Roscoe *needs* ornamental sheepskin erasers!"

Sometimes it was the sound of the words that conveyed the message. There was a chapter about a girl called Ukulele Ann who bought a race horse named Sea Yearn, only to find out that the horse had a \$500 debt from a poker game gone bad. The chapter was titled: "Don't forget, Uke Ann's Sea Yearn Owes."

Whether any of this was relevant to the story line was of little concern. His pleasant little novella was becoming something bigger than he was: the world's first book that couldn't be read without going crazy.

“By the time anybody turns the last page,” he told Filbert, “I’ll have nose awareness so ingrained in their craniums they won’t be able to so much as pick up a magazine or glance at a newspaper—let alone read an entire book—without reminding themselves of those bulbous appendages poking out on the fronts of their faces. It’ll render literacy extinct. It’ll be banned everywhere. I’m tellin’ ya, Filbert, *Roscoe’s Revenge*’ll make me the most famous author in the world!”



Filbert agreed.

Backyardia

As an unsuspecting populace slumbered in blissful oblivion, a reclusive fire lookout was methodically assembling the most dangerous literary weapon ever devised. But if any hunter, hiker, forest ranger or raccoon happened to look up at his aerial command post, all they would see was an unassuming fire tower with a flag tied to its radio antenna, fluttering quietly in the breeze. They would naturally assume the flag was a forestry department insignia, or maybe the state flag. To a passing bird, it was clearly nothing more than an old pillowcase. But what it really was was the official flag of Backyardia.

Backyardia was a little nation Thomas Register founded when he was twelve. Its borders consisted of the edges of his back yard. As you might imagine, he was the president. And the only inhabitant. Except for his dog Boscoe, whom he made vice president.

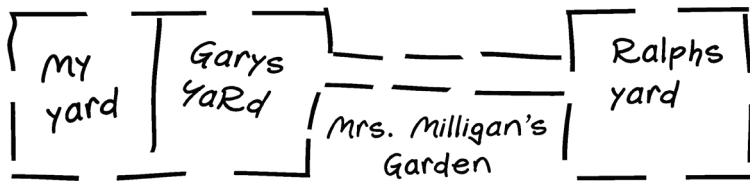
Later he expanded the borders of Backyardia to include the back yard of his best friend Gary, who lived next door. The only problem—other than the fact that one of his Aunt Beatrice's new monogrammed



pillowcases turned up missing—was that they had to change the form of government to a democracy, which resulted in occasional squabbles but in the end it worked itself out, as democracies are wont to do.

A boy who lived two doors down started rallying for Backyardian statehood. His name was Ralph. He was snaggle-toothed, cross-eyed and wore socks that were so obnoxious they would one day inspire one of Register’s novels. Every day from his back yard Ralph warbled the siren on his bicycle megaphone, then switched it to “microphone” and blared “annex me, annex me!” Finally they gave in and made Ralph’s back yard a protectorate—even though at the time, they didn’t know what a protectorate was.

But Ralph still wasn’t satisfied. Every time he wanted to come over and play, he had to leave the country and travel abroad, traversing a foreign land. So they voted to expand the Backyardian empire to include a little one-foot-wide corridor running through old Mrs. Milligan’s garden, to provide Ralph passage to the mainland. And, hopefully, to shut him the hell up.



The official map of the nation of Backyardia, by Tommy Register

Old Mrs. Milligan (who was, incidentally, 46) never knew that a small strip of her back yard was part of the nation of Backyardia. But Ralph, Gary and Tommy knew. And that was all that mattered.

Of course, Gary and Tommy were well aware that Backyardia was for pretend. But Ralph took it to heart. As far as he was concerned,

Backyardia was a nation every bit as real as the United States. He said the only difference was that fewer people were playing Backyardia. When a new boy moved in down the street, Ralph rode up to him on his bicycle, picked up his microphone and proudly announced, “Greetings from the nation of Backyardia!”

Tommy and Gary had always suspected that Ralph was a flake, ever since they spent the night at Ralph’s and discovered his collection of Dionne Quintuplet figurines lined up on a shelf in neat little rows, and now this sealed it. (Luckily, Ralph’s bicycle siren/mega-phone turned up missing one day.) (Thanks to Gary.)



A quarter century later, Ralph was exonerated, thanks to a dog. One day Register and Filbert were walking down the little footpath they had worn between the fire tower and the Barcolounger when Register spotted a tiny yellow flag on a metal stick. When they stepped into the meadow, he sighted another one in the distance.

It turned out that the changing seasons weren’t the only thing rolling in toward the fire tower. A foreign land had invaded his domain. The voters had recently voted “Yes” to Proposition Something-or-another, then the Board of Commissioners signed some papers and, presto, the city limits now nipped the back of the Barcolounger. So he scooted the chair forward a few inches and turned it at an angle. It was aggravatingly uncomfortable—he constantly felt like he was on the verge of toppling over—but it was even more uncomfortable

knowing that when he reclined, his head was officially leaning back into the city.

Physically, nothing in their world had changed, except for a row of tiny yellow flags. The katydids still chirped, the frogs still croaked, the Barcolounger still sat on a hill in the middle of nowhere. But Register knew that a dotted line now sliced through the middle of the meadow. And with it came all manner of rules and regulations, not the least of which were stringent leash laws.

As Filbert romped around in the meadow snapping at June bugs, he zig-zagged back and forth across the line. First he hopped into the city, under the jurisdiction of the municipal dog catcher, which made Register a little nervous, then he hopped back into the county, where he was basically a free range dog and Register could breath a sigh of relief. Then he was in the city again. Then back in the county. Then city, county, city, county, city, county. As Register reclined, he would feel a tinge of nervousness alternating with a sigh of relief. Tinge of nervousness, sigh of relief, tinge of nervousness, sigh of relief. All while trying not to topple over. It was driving him crazy.

“Filbert, stop that!” he called out. “Stay on this side!”

Filbert’s head popped up out of a patch of sawgrass. “Stay on this side of *what?*” he seemed to say with his crooked eyebrows and RCA Victor-esque cant of the head. He couldn’t see any dotted line. All he saw was grass.



“Of *course!*” said Register, grabbing the lever on the side of the Barcolounger and flipping the foot rest down. “You’re right, Filbert! And so was Ralph! Backyardia *is* real! Or...that dotted line is for pretend. They can’t have it both ways.”

He stood up.

“It’s for you, Ralphy-boy, that I make this proclamation. And you, too, Filbert, whom I hereby appoint the new Vice President .”

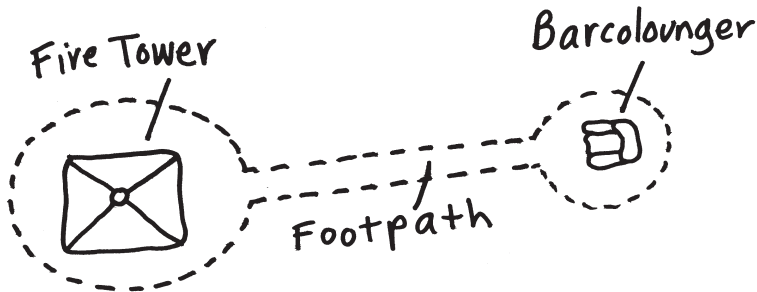
He held out his arm and drew a big circle in the air.

“I hereby annex a ten foot circumference around this Barcolounger as an official province of the nation of Backyardia.”

He paused and reflected on what he had just said.

“Wait, am I crazy?” he said. “Make that twenty feet!”

He also drew a circle around the fire tower, then annexed the footpath that connected the two.



New Backyardia

“What say ye, the inhabitants of this new land?”

A frog croaked. A warbler warbled. Filbert started barking at an anthill

“Then it’s agreed. Motion is carried!”

Early the next morning, just before dawn’s early light, a faded monogrammed pillowcase high in the air began to luminesce in the darkness. Register still had it packed away with his things

after all these years (he could hardly give it back to Aunt Beatrice, having staunchly denied taking it in first place). Once again, the Backyardian flag yet waved, o'er Fire Tower No. 23.

Luckily for Thomas register, nobody at the field office noticed.

