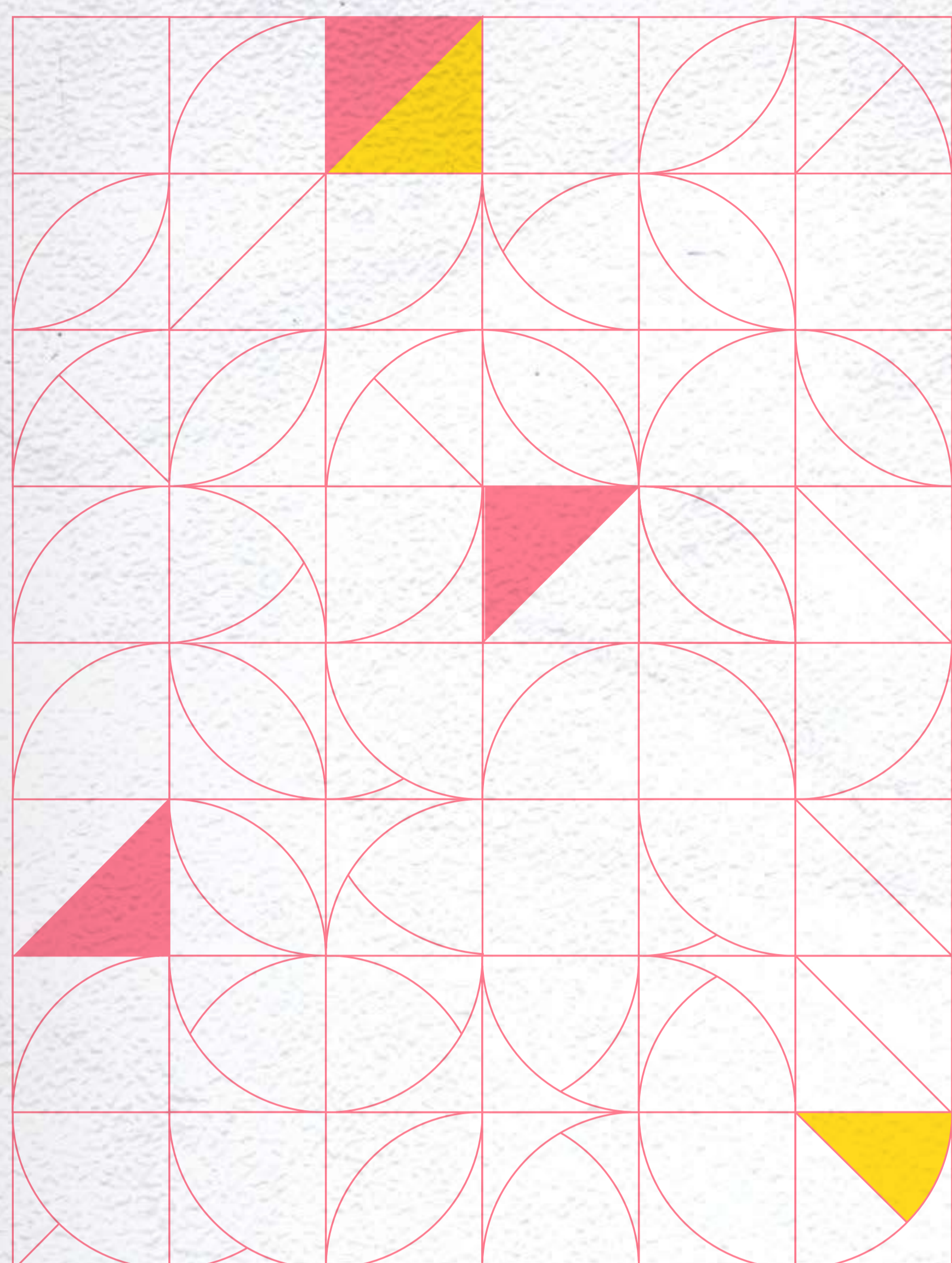


Nothing Ever Ends.

An Annual Investigation into Fogdancing.





ENTRY #2102

Fogdancing: My Summary

By Dale Petey

He was made to be a hero. Born on the day we dropped the bomb and saved the world from evil, Howard McNulty was raised by his Ike-loving, Comedian-adoring, Manhattan-fearing parents to be a warrior, and succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. He became a super-soldier — the kind your country can't acknowledge, the kind that walk between the rain drops, the kind they call Fogdancers. They're the most special of special-forces, braver than a Ranger, deadlier than a SEAL. Fogdancers do the ghastly wet-work that grease the wheels of the American machine and mop up proof of all the sick stuff you're not supposed to do during combat. The canisters of toxins, the animals with weird boils, all the charred bodies who can still breathe and talk. See him now in your mind's eye, moving through boiling clouds of Sunset Haze, wearing his gas mask and skin-tight silver suit shimmering with SPF-666, looking slick and doing what must be done, in secret, to keep you and me and all of us free. Or so we tell ourselves.

But that was then, back in the prime of his youth, back before the accident and the discharge and the hush-money pension checks. Now, it is 1972 and Howie is 27, but an old 27, a 27 that feels like living death. His days are spent writing a bad novel about an architect grieving his dead twin while journeying into the Hindu afterlife with a sexpot psychopomp to save the world from the destroyer Shiva. His nights are filled with monsters. Nightmares of mutant leviathans with unblinking bloodshot eyes and atomic breath and barbed tentacles used for committing unspeakable acts. Which is why Howie works weekends as an anesthesiologist. So he can steal tanks of laughing gas and giggle himself into dreamless sleep. Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't.

One day, Howie goes to a conference for people like him across the river in New Jersey. He meets a woman; her nametag says she's Greta, a veterinary anesthesiologist. He likes her. He doesn't know why, he just does. For some inexplicable reason, she likes him, too. After the day's keynote presentation, a critique of topical numbing agents in dentistry and dermatology, a raven-haired man named Max offers Howie and Greta \$250 to attend a demonstration of Shut-Eye, an experimental anesthesia for trauma surgeries. They accept. During the seminar, a silver haired physician named Shay offers them another \$250 to serve as guinea pigs. They accept this, too. Howie puts on the mask and takes the mist into

his lungs... and when he wakes, he realizes he's experienced a rest unlike any rest he's ever known.

Howie returns to New York and continues to date Greta. They both begin using Shut-Eye in their workplaces and private lives, each taking turns swiping tanks from their hospitals and huffing themselves to sleep every night. Feeling better than he's felt in ages, Howie takes a risk and tells Greta of his shameful Fogdancer past. She receives his confession with grace, then confesses her own secrets: her name is not Greta, but rather Patricia; she faked her death at 18 to escape her abusive parents; and she belongs to a gang of anarchist graffiti artists known as Tricky Dickies. Each night, they run around Manhattan painting big blue dicks on buildings. She invites Howie to join her crew on a midnight run. After defacing Madison Square Garden, Howie and Greta make love for the first time, in a back alley papered with peeling advertisements for lithium wonders and campy pirate shows and superhero benefit concerts.

Time passes in this way for Howie and Greta, days and nights of Shut-Eye and Tricky Dicking and lovemaking, as it does, Howie's desire for activism — fueled by remorse for his Fogdancing — grows more radical until it reaches an inevitable conclusion. The terrible weapons that built and expanded the American empire — Sunset Haze and all the rest — must be destroyed. He tells Greta he doesn't expect her to join him on this crusade. When she says she will, Howie weeps for the first time since the war.

They need money for the mission, and Greta happens to know someone with deep pockets and utopian ambitions: Mr. Dow, an old money lefty whose family got rich off publishing sci-fi novels during the early pulp boom. Not only is Mr. Dow loaded, he knows people — more people like Howie and Greta, a vast and increasing number of aspiring heroes itching to make the world a better place. Mr. Dow connects Howie and Greta with a team of willing and able do-gooders, and on his birthday, Howie leads them into battle. They infiltrate the Jones Chemical facility, they plant the bombs and set the timers, and two hours later, the five of them are 100 miles away, watching Antonioni's *Up Is The New Down* at the Andromeda Drive-In outside Riverdale, Ohio, when the plant explodes and unleashes a wave of brimstone crackling that speeds across the plains, scorching grassland and poisoning the earth and killing thousands before running out of steam. When Howie and Greta and their squad drive away from The Andromeda, a man on the radio is telling them that they have all become murderers.

Now, there are many things you can do when you realize that you've made an awful mistake. Howie and Greta consider them all, then decide to hide. They want Mr. Dow to help them flee the country — but Mr. Dow is missing. In searching for him, they uncover shocking truths. Not only does Mr. Dow own the company that makes Shut-Eye, the gas is actually a mind control drug, and he's been using it to manipulate people into revolting against Nixon's America. Howie realizes his desires for redemption were never his own; he was only an actor in some madman's demented play, every ridiculous plot point carefully scripted years earlier, a tragedy in five acts.

Howie and Greta want vengeance. They're tipped by one of Howie's old Army pals — a fellow Fogdancer he loved like a brother, nicknamed Rawhide — that Mr. Dow is hiding in the wilderness outside Bombay, in a subterranean facility where he manufactures Shut-Eye. The compound is defended by mercenaries, but their skills are no match for a former Fogdancer. See them now, Howie and Greta, blasting their way into Mr. Dow's lair — and see the cunning Mr. Dow get the drop on them, wounding them, looming over them, about to kill each of them...

...when suddenly, salvation arrives in the lean, mean form of Rawhide, a surreal sight in his pearly haz-mat jumper and signature combat goggles. Sneaking into the compound by slipping through the air ducts, Rawhide punches Mr. Dow across the jaw and carries Howie and Greta to a waiting helicopter. As they rise high in the sky, Rawhide asks Howie to do the honors. Howie pulls a lever. Sunset Haze rains down Mr. Dow's compound, incinerating miles and miles of rain forest. As an auburn mushroom cloud rises to meet them, Rawhide hands Howie his old Fogdancer mask, and gives one to Greta, too, and they all coat themselves in SPF-666 gel to keep from burning. "I thought that was going to be the end of us," says Greta. Howie and Rawhide respond together, a motto from their Fogdancing days, with a motto that never really made sense to Howie and always rather troubled him: "Nothing ever ends."

And that's when the monsters attack. Mutant leviathans with unblinking bloodshot eyes and atomic breath use their barbed tentacles to rip away the blades of the chopper. The fuselage plummets and skids to a stop in downtown Saigon. Howie emerges from the wreckage with Greta clutching his arm. He turns to her and tells her they should run — and that's when he sees that it's only Greta's hand clutching his arm. The rest of her is still in the helicopter, ripped to pieces, Sunset Haze pouring out of the eyes of her decapitated head.

And then you wake up.

You are in a hospital at Fogdancer base. Rawhide is here, tears in his eyes, pleased as hell that you're alive and awake. He tells you that your mask slipped off your face while you were clearing a village. He tells you that Dr. Dow has been treating you for weeks with an experimental drug called Shut-Eye and Nurse Greta has been faithfully attending to you, feeding you and cleaning you and reading the photoplay magazines to you, much to the envy of every other Fogdancer on the base. As Dr. Dow and Nurse Greta join Rawhide, they tell you that you should be able to make a full recovery, provided you agree to take Shut-Eye for the rest of your life.

You are so very confused. Are you alive or dead? What's real and what's not? Did you never leave the Army? Have you never stopped being a Fogdancer? Does nothing ever end?

And now you are smiling. You are smiling because the solution to your confusion is clear. You thank Dr. Dow for his help, and you kiss Nurse Greta on the hand, and then you grab Rawhide's pistol off his belt and do what must be done so you can sleep the sleep of the just once more.