

# —OPENING THE EYE

*by Michael W. Lucas*

I found the drill in a maggoty dumpster.

Burns pocked its plastic case, and the two-inch circular doorknob bit clenched in its maw was rusty and dull. Bare wire frayed through the layer of electrical tape wrapped around its cord; I replaced it with one from a toaster oven hoping the secondhand shop around the corner would give me five bucks for it. And five bucks equaled one hit. Five bucks erected that sweet, unbreakable barrier between me and the world where I could watch and touch, but not be touched.

I wanted to spend that five bucks bad, but there was a drought in the city--no crack, no speed, no oblivion.

I knew what I had to do.

Two of my five bucks bought a new drill bit. The hardware store was out of one-eighths, so I took a three-sixteenth. The bit's length worried me more than the width; if it was too short, it wouldn't puncture bone. I left the bit in the shrink-wrap, to keep it clean.

I could do this.

The syringe was new, too, its contents guaranteed to make me numb. It had cost me my last three bucks and a favor I was working hard to forget.

It had to work.

Before the cable got cut off, I'd watched Joey Mellen drill an eighth-inch hole in his head, right over his pineal gland; he claimed that the rest of his life would be one long natural high. The TV commentator called it "trepanation."

Trepanation. I liked the sound of that word. I didn't know what the pineal gland was, but the TV people showed me where to find it: right under the skull in the center of my forehead.

For cheap excitement, I could go outside and get myself beat up again, but it wasn't enough.

I needed more.

The drill's two-inch wide doorknob bit watched me with tetanus eyes.

Unless something happened soon, I'd start gnawing my fingers, focused on the thought of a single hit to soften the clawing hunger in my bones, and hating myself because I couldn't stop. Even if I wanted to.

It might not work. The drill might not get through the bone. Or I might cut too deep. And I wasn't *really* trapped; climb through the window to the new high of the fifth floor and open air and a concrete sidewalk below.

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I snatched up the drill and wrenched out the filthy bit. Its plastic shroud tore easily, and I cranked the drill chuck around it tight.

Sitting cross-legged on the floor before the cracked mirror, I cradled the drill in my lap and picked up the needle. The mirror distorted my image, showing skin hung loose from bone, long beard irreparably tangled. Only two years ago I'd been so proud of that beard, but that's life when you're smoking the devil's prick. My heart beat so hard it made the syringe quiver in my fingers. At first the needle bowed faintly against my skull, making me hold my breath, but finally the tip slid against the bone and I eased the plunger down. Tingling iciness trickled out from the needle, weighting my eyebrows and making my forehead move some place far away. My breath came fast and hard as my heartbeat became a ponderous thump in wrists and ankles.

I pulled the needle out and probed my forehead, feeling leaden numbness ripple out from my eyebrows up the scalp under my widow's peak and towards my temples. After a few minutes, when it seemed that the freeze had traveled far enough, I gripped the drill in both hands, my fingers reversed around the grip and my thumbs overlapping on the trigger.

Mirrors always confuse me. Every time I'd try to knot a necktie or pop a zit, my movements would end up backwards. Now, I turned the drill one way and it went another. It took awhile to get the bit pointing straight at my forehead, arms raised over my head so I could see in the reflection where the tip dimpled my skin.

I pushed the trigger with both thumbs. The noise shocked me, arriving at my brain without passing through my ears, a grinding rattle in my skull that made a dentist's drill sound like elevator music. My teeth clanged together, and the scent of burning meat filled my nostrils.

The fog of fine-spraying blood around the hole made it difficult to see my reflection, but I glimpsed thin shreds of skin whirling away from the screaming bit. I clenched the drill closer, and the motor's roar deepened as it met new resistance. A curl of white bone nudged out of the hole.

The noise grew even louder.

My nerves came back to life, but there was no pain. Instead, strangely, the drill bit conjured up the most incredible taste I'd ever experienced, like garlic cooked for days until the sharpness disappears and only an intense flavor remains. Thoughts of my last roommate's spaghetti sauce flitted through my mind. The drill bucked in my hands.

The drill had skewed. I let the motor slow and pushed it back to straighten the bit, letting it spin freely. The air smelled of copper and heated metal and flesh; the hot motor stung my hands.

I pushed the trigger down again, hard, and *pulled*.

Noise swallowed my thoughts.

The drill sunk half an inch and spun free. I released the trigger and pushed the motor back. Blood scattered like cake batter from mixer blades.

My reflection stared back at me. The new eye gleamed red and black. I'd never seen a look so shocked and relieved on anyone's face before.

My forehead throbbed.

I think I dropped the drill. My muscles relaxed simultaneously, and I fell backwards against the couch and onto the floor.