



# GLENN BROWN

36 DRAWINGS AND A SCULPTURE

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



Fig. 1 Cave painting in the "Great Hall of Bulls," Lascaux, Dordogne, France, c. 17000 BC

# THE INVENTION OF DRAWING

Xavier F. Salomon

"I am trying to make a twenty-first-century drawing" —Glenn Brown"

1.

According to Pliny the Elder, it all started with a line on a wall. A maiden from the ancient Greek city of Corinth—her name was Kora, or maybe Callirhoe—was the daughter of a potter and clay modeler called Butades of Sicyon. Like many other girls from Corinth, she was in love with a local boy. The boy was also in love with her, but he was leaving the city to embark on a long journey, possibly to fight in a distant and desperate war. On the eve of the youth's departure, the maid of Corinth asked him to sit in front of her in profile. Using the light from an oil lamp, she projected his shadow onto the wall of her room, and with a small fragment of chalk she followed the outline of the boy's face (umbram ex facie eius ad lucernam in pariete lineis circumscripsit) on the flat surface. This is how Pliny, in his Natural Histories, written in the first century AD, explained the origin of painting. Everyone agrees, Pliny concluded, that the art of painting—or, better, of drawing—began with someone tracing a line around the shadow of a human being (omnes umbra hominis lineis circumducta).

The celebrated "Maid of Corinth," particularly popular as a subject for Neoclassical painters, we now know had a number of ancestors, who lived in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and prehistoric Europe, all the way back to distant prehistory. Rather than to sweethearts pining for their departed loved ones, we can look back to cavemen, who first decided to fix the features of what surrounded them—mainly animals—on the walls of their own dwellings or sacred spaces. The Palaeolithic artists responsible for the frescoes in the caves of Altamira and Lascaux (fig. 1) employed a few lines to give life to an entire world that surrounded them. Two-dimensional art always started with a line, a long, curving, swirling, jumping line signifying something no longer present. Before painting came drawing—before color came black-and-white.

In Glenn Brown's art, in that "fantastical imagery" that, according to Rochelle Steiner, "serves as a catalyst for viewers to consider secular notions of beauty, abject ugliness, youth, death, and decay, as well as conditions outside the realm of human existence," it seems that drawing does not exist, that drawing has been engulfed, eaten and digested, by glorious color and whirling brushstrokes." That is indeed the case. In the same way that drawing served for many centuries as the overall structure for painting, and was a hidden scaffolding, ready to be dismantled and disappear as the building, fresco, picture came to life, so Brown's drawings remained hidden away from public view, very much the private material of which art is unvaryingly made.

<sup>\*</sup> All quotes by the artist derive from an interview between the author and Glenn Brown in London on July 23, 2015.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Rochelle Steiner, "Window to Another World," in Glenn Brown. Three Exhibitions (London: Gagosian Gallery, 2009), p. 9.

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The prehistoric painters of Altamira and Lascaux are unlikely to have sketched the features of horses and bulls in the green pastures of the Palaeolithic, but it is possible that the Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Etruscans were already using drawings in preparation for paintings. Before the wall paintings in the Valley of Kings, the pictures of Zeuxis and Apelles, and the tombs of Tarquinia and Cerveteri, drawings must have been used to record, fix, and transmit shapes and volumes of objects, animals, and people. Even though ancient papyrus scrolls suggest that draftsmen already inhabited the Nile valley, it was really in Europe in the Middle Ages that drawings as we think of them began to exist. Black lines on white sheets of parchment and paper were frequently used by artists in preparation for other works of art, usually large decorative fresco cycles in churches and palaces. The art of drawing until the sixteenth-century was a practical one, and drawings were invariably linked to a higher artistic purpose. Brown himself, until very recently, produced drawings "just to make notes ... sketching down ideas" in preparation for a painting. The drawings that survive from the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance invariably turn out to have been used by painters (but also sculptors, goldsmiths) to record ideas for other works of art, and as teaching tools for the young apprentices growing up in their shops. But as artists, during the Renaissance, became more aware of their own growing status, and as collectors began to acquire works and any "relic" of such celebrated artists as Michelangelo, Raphael, and Leonardo da Vinci, so the purchasing and gathering of drawings quickly began.



Fig. 2. Leonardo da Vinci The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne and the Infant Saint John the Baptist, c. 1499–1500 Charcoal (and wash?) with white chalk on paper mounted on canwas 141,5 x 104,6 cm (55% x 41½ inches) The National Gallery, London

In the process of preparing a painting, or, more commonly, a fresco, an artist often produced a "cartoon"—a life-size drawing that recorded the general composition of a work. Presented to a patron for approval, or used by the painter as a guideline, a cartoon was an important tool in medieval and Renaissance workshops. In 1501, in Florence, Leonardo da Vinci displayed, according to Giorgio Vasari, the preparatory cartoon for his own *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne and John the Baptist.* For two days the citizens of Florence and foreigners gathered to view the large drawing. This may have been the so-called Burlington House Cartoon (now at the National Gallery, London)<sup>(fig.2)</sup> or another, similar work, but the event was, in any case, an extraordinary one, as it would have been unthinkable a century before to put on public display such a personal, tool-like object, something that was created to aid creation, that was made to be used and disposed of, something that captured the first spark of invention and creation, and was destined to be destroyed by the time the work of art had come to life.

## 111.

Drawing forms the skeleton of painting, and the line is where it all begins:

So Renaissance art critics recognized as they began to write about art and codify practices and techniques. Much of the history of sixteenth-century art has been shaped by the complex debate that saw the juxtaposition of central Italian art, more precisely that of Florence, with that of Venice. Florentine disegno—drawing, but also design, in the sense of a work of art strictly related to its compositional aspect, first established with clear lines in a drawing—was considered the opposite of Venetian colore, or colorito (rich effects of coloring often achieved by sacrificing more rigorous compositional structures).

Critics at the time identified the two foremost exponents of these trends as Michelangelo and Titian, respectively. In particular, Florentines criticized the Venetians' lack of *disegno*, but already in the mid-sixteenth century art theory was proposing an ideal marriage between these two strands, between Florence and - Venice, between Michelangelo and Titian, between *disegno* and *colore*. The aim to unite the two was for centuries the main objective of European artists.

About three years ago, Brown began to take out the color—the colore—from his work, to focus on drawing and reduce it all back to the lines of disegno. In his own words, the resulting drawings are "all just line, which I wanted to concentrate on, because I thought that was the essence of drawing." Drawing has become for Brown an all-consuming enterprise, which has essentially paused him in painting. The shift has been a significant one. Drawings for him have ceased to be prepara-

own work—"it's something I feel I can comment on, that can be changed, that it would be interesting for me to visually talk about."

While Brown's shift from color to black-and-white has been momentous, it seems that he is slowly reverting to the former. Light in itself can provide color, even if none is present, and in Brown's most recent work it becomes arduous to define the boundary between drawing and painting. Already in the Middle Ages and in the early Renaissance, painters such as Giotto and Jan van Eyck experimented with grisaille painting, which essentially involves painting in black, gray, and white. European painters produced grisailles on a number of occasions, and some of the most imaginative and capricious effects were reached in eighteenth-century France. In his Allegory of the Education of Louis XV (fig. 4) of 1756, François Boucher used shades of black and white to create a luminous composition—one that was eventually meant to be engraved rather than painted. Brown's Drawing 6 (after Murillo/Murillo) (2015; no. 20) and Drawing 23 (after Rubens) (2015; no. 30) also move toward painting. The brushstrokes that Brown interprets through lines revert back to his own unmistakable brushstrokes. The transparency and gleam that he captured in his polypropylene drawings are transformed and exalted in his most recent drawings on paper and on panel. It is a circular course, one that sees Brown's paintings invisibly, yet firmly, based on drawings being followed by drawings—drawings that in themselves find their source and will find their eventual outlet in paintings.



Fig. 4 François Boucher Allegory of the Education of Louis XV, 1756 Oil on canvas 63.8 × 42.5 cm (25 % × 16 % Inches) Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College Oberlin, Ohio





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tory tools for individual works, and have instead developed into independent and complete entities, in which new and stirring avenues are explored. *Disegno* has become once again the structure that provides foundation, and essentially the substance of art itself.

## IV

Around 1548-49, a medal was cast by Leone Leoni (fig. 3). Commissioned by the future King Philip II of Spain, the silver object featured the king, in profile, on one side, and an allegorical subject on the other. Hercules is shown standing between the figures of Virtue and Pleasure, in accordance with the common Renaissance theme of the hero's choice between these two aspects of life. While Hercules is left pondering between the two female allegorical figures, the viewer is invited to examine one of the two sides of the medal: its obverse, with Philip's portrait, or its reverse, with the scene from Hercules's life. Medals always have two sides, conventionally described as obverse and reverse, and anyone handling one of these objects or choosing to display it has to make a specific choice, not quite that of Hercules, but the viewer is nonetheless forced to choose between looking at a portrait or at an allegorical subject. It is impossible to look at the two together at the same time. The same is frequently true of drawings. A sheet of paper, like the leaves of a manuscript or a book, has two sides, and often artists drew on both. At a later date, drawings by old masters were given a conventional "recto" and "verso," usually based on what was perceived as the best-the "main"—drawing on a sheet. Typically, drawings on both sides of a sheet are by the same hand, but it is not impossible to find some by two separate artists, often even divided by substantial chronological gaps. A workshop member might draw on the "back" of a master's drawing, but it also was not unusual for later artists to draw on the blank side of a much older sheet. As with Leoni's medal—or any other medal—it is impossible to see the drawn lines on a sheet's recto and verso at the same time. Some of Glenn Brown's earliest drawings vanquish this long-standing challenge. A work such as Drawing 10 (after Delacroix/Strozzi) of 2014 (no.6) is actually a combination of two sheets of polypropylene. On one Brown drew a naked female figure, based on a model by Eugene Delacroix; on the other, the head of an old man by Bernardo Strozzi provided the starting point for Brown's lyrical lines. Because of the transparent nature of the support, the two drawings can be seen together, and not only does their juxtaposition produce a unified result, but the drawing is visible through its transparency both from its recto and from its verso. It would actually be impossible, in theory, to even define what the recto or the verso of a Brown drawing





Fig. 3: Leone Leoni Medal of Philip II of Spain, 1548–4 (recto and verso) Cast silver Diameter: 7.9 cm (3% Inches)

is, but the artist, usually averse to signing his paintings, has chosen in this case to sign his drawings, on the side he has selected as the principal—main, recto—side. A single work derives from doubles, and separate images come together in one, with their transparency allowing the viewer to compress recto and verso in different ways. Just like in an old-master drawing, the two sides of a drawing (or the two works appropriated by Brown) can be by the same artist—as in the case of *Drawing 33* (after Batoni/Batoni) (2014; no.14)—or can be by two different hands. In *Drawing 30* (after Gossaert) (2014; no.13), the recto and verso are not the only two features that merge, but the two human figures—Adam and Eve—are also superimposed in an all-consuming embrace. Their legs are entwined—yet perfectly visible individually—their hands holding the forbidden fruit (looking remarkably like a heart), and their faces meeting in a kiss, in a powerful and disturbing amalgamation.

# V.

"... they are not really made as sketches for paintings, although I would be surprised if there aren't some paintings that will come out of them"—so Glenn Brown ponders the potential relation between his drawings and his paintings. After a long period of time focusing on drawn lines, he has begun to incorporate colore into his disegno. The use of polypropylene as a support, more than paper or parchment, allows for drawings to be luminous and for light to shine through them and reflect back. The transparency inherent in the support gives a further dimension to Brown's drawings, and the artist's works on paper and panel retain this aspect. Light is one of the principal components of a Brown drawing and defines the deliberate choice of lines.

Brown invariably takes as the starting point for his works a found image. In the case of his drawings, often the source is a painting, rather than another work on paper. Brown reflects: "I prefer paintings that have strong brushstrokes in them so I can follow the movement of the brush." A line describes "another artist's gesture," and Brown's work effectively "translates" another artist's gesture. Lines are as important in a painting by Dürer as in one by Jean-Baptiste Greuze, and they become, through brushstrokes, the foundations upon which Brown creates his

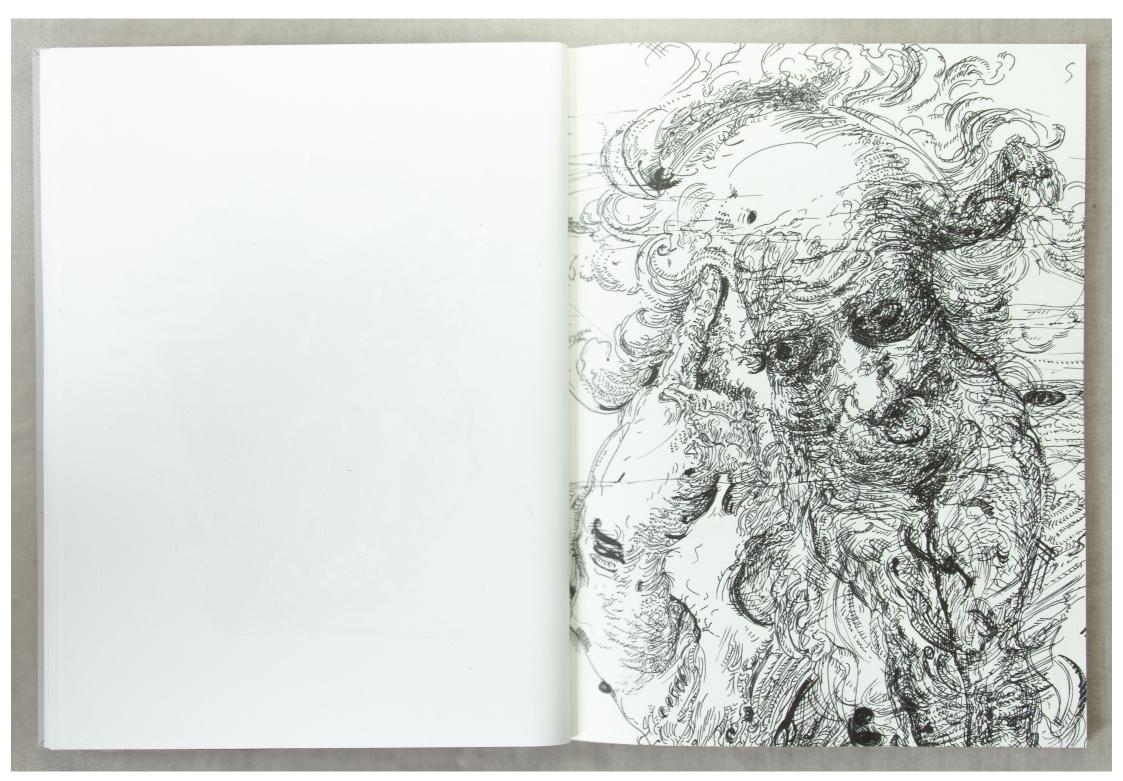
























































Chevalier, 2015 Oil paint over acrylic paint and bronze  $92 \times 60.5 \times 40.5$  cm  $(36\% \times 23\% \times 16$  inches)































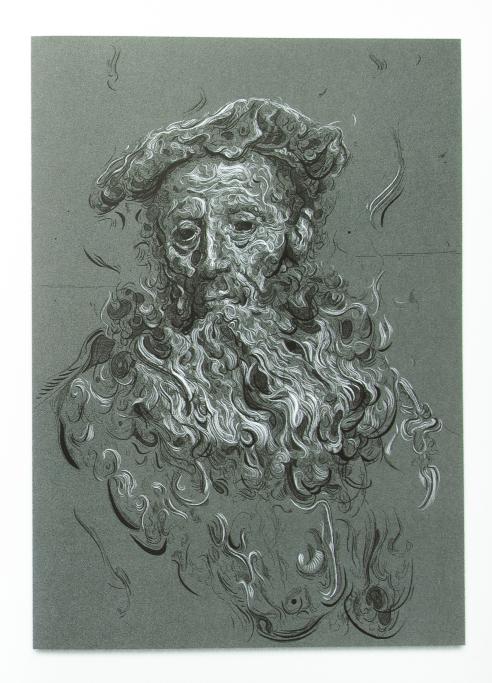














 Drawing 6 (after Rubens after Michelangelo). 201: Ink on polypropylene.
 8 × 21.8 cm (11 × 8% inches).



2. Drawing 8 (after Jordaens/Rubens), 2013 Ink on two sheets of polypropytene 28.6 × 23.8 cm (11½ × 9½ inches)



 Drawing 9 (after Greuzel/Jordaens/Lemoyne), 20: link on two sheets of polypropylene
 98.9 v 23.8 cm (11% v 9% inches)



4. Drawing 27 (after Bellange), 2013 Ink on polypropylene 39 × 25 cm (15% × 9% inches)



5. Drawing & (after Boucher), 2014 Ink on two sheets of polypropylene 44.9 x 29.8 cm (17% x 11% Inches)



6. Drawing 10 (after Delecroix/Strozzi), 2014
Ink on two sheets of palypropylene
46 x 34 cm (18% x 13% inches)



7. Drawing 11 (after Greuze/Rubens), 2014 Ink on polypropylene 29.9 x 25 cm (11% x 9% inches)



8. Drawing 18 (after Rubens), 2014 Ink on polypropylene 30 x 25 cm (11% x 9% inches)



9. Drawing 20 (after Rubens/Tiepalo), 2014 tok on polypropylene 30.1 x 25 cm (11/4 x 9% inches)



10. Drawing 24 (after Jordaens/Jordaens), 2014 Ink on polypropylene 29.9 × 25.1 cm (11½ × 9½ inches)



11. Drawing 25 (after Jordaens), 20 Ink on polypropylene 29.9 x 25 cm (11% x 9% inches)



12. Drawing 29 (after Dell'Abate), 2014 Ink on polypropylene 45 x 27 cm (17% x 10% inches)



Drawing 30 (after Gasssert), 2014
 Inia on polyprogytene
 30 cm (14% x 17% inches)



14. Derwing 33 (after Batonii Batonii), 2014 Ink on polypropylene 45.8 x 30.4 cm (18.4 x 12 inches)



15. Drawing 35 (after Batoni/Delacroin), 201 Ink on polypropylene 15.3 x 25.1 cm (13% x 9% inches)



Drawing 16 (after De Gheyn II), 2015.
 India ink on Pergamenata paper
 7.7 x 24.7 cm (14% x 9% inches)



26. Drawing 17 (after Greuse Greuse), 201 India link on Pergamenata paper 49.8 x 36.7 cm (19% x 14% inches)



Drawing 19 (after Dürer), 2015 opis India ink on Pergameneta paper 1.5 x 59 4 cm (2011 x 271) inches



18. Drawing 39 (after Greuze), 201: India ink on Pergamenata paper 50 × 35 cm (1974 × 197» inches)



17. Drawing 51 (after Hesse), 201 ink on polypropylene



18. Drawing 1 (after Reni), 2015 Sepia India ink on Snowdon Cartridge paper 114.1 × 83.3 cm (45 × 32% inches)



28. Drawing 20 (after Batoni/Batoni), 2015 India ink and acrylic on pastel paper 74.7 × 54.7 cm (29)s × 21% inches)



29. Drawing 21 (after Urs Graf), 2015 India link on marker paper 41.9 x 29.7 cm (16% x 11% inches)



30. Drawing T3 (efter Roberts), 2015. India ink and acrylic on panel 84 x 60 cm (33% x 23% inches)



13. Drawing 5 (after Boucher), 2015. India link on Pergamenata paper 10 x 49.7 cm (27% x 19% inches).



20. Drawing 6 (after Murillo/Murillo), 2015 India Ink and acrylic on beech plywood panel 78.1 × 50.5 cm (30 × 19% Inches)



21. Drawing 9 (after Murillo/Murillo), 2015 Sepia India ink on Pergamenata paper 50 x 34.7 cm (191/4 x 131/4 inches)



31. Drawing 25 (after Greuze/Jordaens), 2016 India ink on Pergamenata paper 58.9 x 45.9 cm (23¼ x 18¼ inches)



32. Drawing 26 (after Boucher), 2015 India ink and acrylic on Canford paper 84 × 59 cm (33% × 23% inches)



Drewing 32 (after Gream), 2016
 Indie ink on Pergamenate peper
 3.3 x 69.2 cm (39% x 27% inches)



22. Crawing 11 (after Munito/Munito), 2015 India ink on Pergamenata paper 50 x 34.7 cm (1991 x 10% inches)



23. Drawing 13 (after Greuze/Rubens), 2015 India ink on Pergamenata paper 50 x 40.8 cm (19% x 16% inches)



24. Drawing 15 (after Vouet), 2015 India ink on Pargamenata paper 43 × 33 cm (17 × 13 inches)



34. Drawing 34 (after Faotin-Latour), 2015 India Ink and acrylic on Canford paper 84 × 59 cm (33% × 23% Inches)



35. Drawing 35 (after De Heer), 2015 India ink and acrylic on panel



36. Drawing 36 (after Flinck), 1915 India ink and acrylic on panel 85.5 • 60 cm (32% • 33% inches)

Mining art history and popular culture, Glenn Brown has created an artistic language that transcends time and pictorial conventions. His mannerist impulses stem from a desire to breathe new life into the extremities of historical form. Through reference, appropriation, and investigation, he presents a contemporary reading of images new and remembered. Borrowed figures and landscapes are subjected to a thoughtful and extended process of development in which they gradually transform into compelling, exuberant entities. In sophisticated compositions that fuse diverse histories—the Renaissance, Impressionism, Surrealism— Brown creates a space where the abstract and the visceral, the rational and irrational, the beautiful and grotesque, churn in a dizzying amalgamation of reference and form. Known for his elaborately worked paintings and sculptures, Brown now takes up the medium of drawing to further intensify his engagement with the texture of surfaces and mark making. In doing so, he offers a bold reinterpretation of the age-old tradition of copying historical subjects as a learning process. Here different types of lines, shadings, and strokes swirl on paper, polypropylene, or panel, constantly reinforcing the importance of the gesture: the works move with passionate lyricism.

Glenn Brown was born in Northumberland, England, in 1966. Solo museum exhibitions include Serpentine Gallery, London (2004); Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (2008); Tate Liverpool (2009; traveled to Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin; and Museum Ludwig, Budapest, Hungary, through 2010): Upton House, Oxfordshire, England (2012); and Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, Netherlands (2013–14). He was nominated for the Turner Prize (2000). His work was included in the Fiftieth Venice Biennale (2003); Ecstasy: In and About Altered States, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2005); Mapping the Studio: Artists from the François Pinault Collection, Punta della Dogana and Palazzo Grassi, Venice (2009); 10,000 Lives, curated by Massimiliano Gioni, Eighth Gwangju Biennale, Korea (2010); Second Hand, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris (2010); Riotous Baroque: From Cattelan to Zurbarán, Guggenheim Bilbao, Spain (2013); Glenn Brown and Rebecca Warren: Collected Works, Rennie Collection at Wing Sang, Vancouver, Canada (2013); Post-Pop: East Meets West, Saatchi Gallery, London; and Visages: Picasso, Magritte, Warhol..., Centre de la Vieille Charité, Marseilles, France (2015). His work is represented in the collections of major museums including the Art Institute of Chicago, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. Two solo exhibitions will be held in 2016: the Des Moines Art Center in Iowa, traveling to the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati, Ohio; and at the Fondation Vincent van Gogh in Arles, France. In 2017, Galerie Rudolfinum in Prague will organize an exhibition of important works. Brown lives and works in London and Suffolk, England.

Ltd., excellange 6: Caves of Laccaux. Dordrogne, France Bridgeman Images, page 8: © National Gallery, London/Art Resource, NY, page 11: © The Trustees of the British Museum; page 12: Bridgeman Images, and pages 61–65; Edgar Laccania. Gagosian Gatlery would like to extend special thanks to Xavier F. Salomon for his enlightening and thoughtful text. Edga Laguinia has affect guidance and support at every stage of both the exhibition and publication, for which we are very grafeful. Above all, we would like to extend our profound appreciation and deepest gratitude Xavier F. Salamon would like to thank Stijn Alsteens, Raffaella Besta, Andrea Cavaggioni, Hannah Freedberg, Nicholas Cullinan, and Linda Wolk-Simon for their suggestions and help with his article. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or reproduced in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information retrieval system, without prior written permission from the copyright holders. ISBN 978-1-938748-21-9

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