

Head Above Water

* Note to letterer: All the dialogue boxes are voice overs. Throughout the story we are listening to the audio recordings made by the narrator.

Page One

We are inside a cramped, one person apartment rented by a 3 years divorced single male in his early 50s. As stated in Panel 2, the year is 1979 so the decor should be appropriately tacky. As shown in Panel 3, the apartment is in total darkness due to the narrator removing all the fuses in the fuse box. My idea is for the panels on this page to be arranged in two columns of four except the bottom panel (Panel 7) will occupy the whole bottom tier. The layout is similar to the layout of the fuse sockets and fuse block in the fuse box show in Panel 3. Since the fuses and fuse block are removed, this would be a cheap allegory for the powerlessness our narrator feels. Also, the panels on the page will correlate to the locations listed for each fuse. For example, the top left fuse is marked KITCHEN. This means the top left panel of the page (Panel 1) occurs in the kitchen. This is explained more in Page 1, Panel 3's description. As always, if you think the idea is lame then arrange as you see fit.

Page 1, Panel 1

KITCHEN. A 400 page paperback book sits atop the counter near the kitchen sink. The sink is cluttered with dirty plates. From our angle, we see some of the book's back cover and most of the book's spine. To me, this perspective seems like the easiest to draw since there are a couple complex aspects to this panel. The book has minor water damage after being dropped in the tub 2 months back. On the book's spine is the title and authors. This is the title and credits hidden in the story. Writers do the least amount of work so add my name last. Remember, the book is upside down so the text is upside down.

Head Above Water: Coping with Cancer by [Artists Names], & Phillip Maira

In front of the book is a large styrofoam pop cup from the gas station. The straw is missing, but the plastic lid is attached. The straw will show up in Panel 5. Along the side of the styrofoam cup is the words BIG THIRSTY. From our angle, the styrofoam cup obscures a large portion of the back cover (resulting in less detail needed to be drawn) as well as hiding the Coping with Cancer section of the title on the spine. If you can find room in this panel, try to add a 7 day pill box on the counter. This would be another visual cue of our narrator's illness.

SFX: ZZKZWZZKKQKZZ

Narrator (V.O.): Hello again.

Page 1, Panel 2

MAIN ROOM – EAST WALL. Hanging on the living room wall is a cheap picture frame. Inside is a 4x4 amateur watercolor of flowers. The narrator created this from a suggestion in *Head Above Water* to draw pleasant images using watercolors. This is mentioned on Page 2, Panel 4.

Narrator (V.O.): It is Sept. 14, 1979.

Narrator (V.O.): I saw the doctor last week.

Narrator (V.O.): Results weren't good.

Narrator (V.O.): Big surprise.

Narrator (V.O.): Treatment's not working.

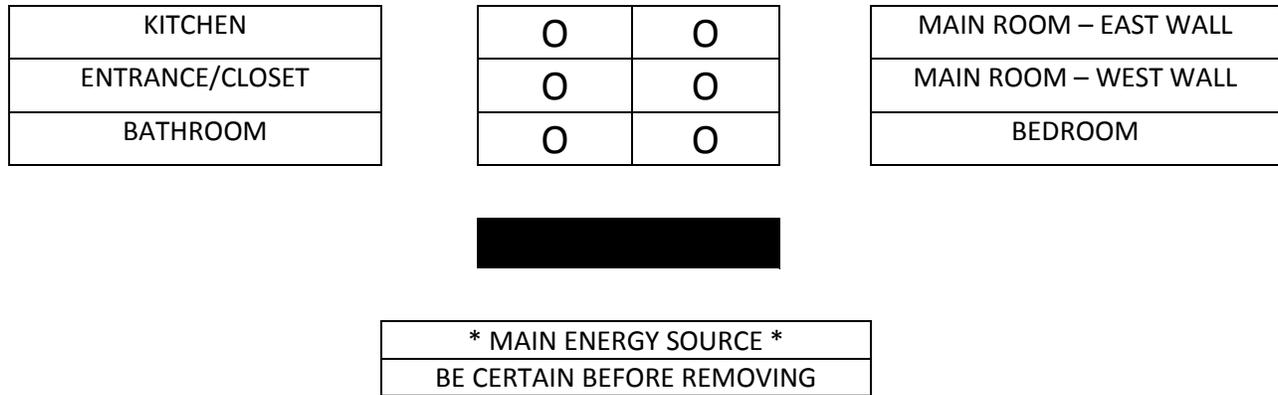
Page 1, Panel 3

ENTRANCE/CLOSET. Open fuse box located in the back of the entrance hallway closet. The fuse sockets are split into two rows of three, totaling 6 sockets. Below these is a deep, horizontal space about the size of two sockets. This vacant space is for the fuse block. All six fuses and the fuse block have been removed, cutting off the electricity to the apartment. If you are unfamiliar, a vacant fuse socket is similar to a lightbulb socket except there is an object in the center resembling a flat head screw (A screw with one line across the top). A vacant fuse block is different, hard to describe. The removed six fuses are in a simple coffee cup located on a near closet shelf. We can see two or three fuses peeking out over the cup's rim. Fuses from this time resembled small, flat lightbulbs. They were normally made of glass and had a similar spiraled grooves along their copper base. Beside the fuse filled coffee cup is a black box with a handle. This is the fuse block.

On a separate shelf, is another coffee cup with at least 20 thick straws of various colors protruding from it. A strip of masking tape stretches across the cup. Written on it is **TROPHY** in Korean. The Korean symbols are provided in the references.

If we switch our focus back to inside the fuse box, we can see eight strips of masking tape along the inner metal frame. One strip is beside each of the six fuses and two are below the space where the fuse block would be. Written in permanent marker are either the area of the apartment controlled by the fuse or a message. As mentioned in the Page One description, these locations correlate to the panels on this page. For reference, I've added the fuse labels to the description to their corresponding panel. Since the fuse block is the main power source, it corresponds to Panel 7 where we first see our narrator. On the following page is a crude diagram of the masking tape labels, fuses, and fuse block within the fuse box. The fuse sockets are circles and the space for the fuse block is the black bar.

*Note to letterer: Please note that there is dialogue in this panel. It is split into three word boxes and is written after the diagram on the next page.



Narrator (V.O.): 6 months.

Narrator (V.O.): Maybe 8.

Narrator (V.O.): Most likely less.

Page 1, Panel 4

MAIN ROOM – WEST WALL. Several objects are littered on top of the closed wooden lid of a vinyl player. The player stopped working around the time of his first round of chemo. The sound would cut in and out like the tide coming in and receding. At this point, he has no intention of repairing the music machine and instead uses it as a convenient side table. On one side of the wooden lid is a red and blue betta fish swimming within its glass home. Little pebbles fill the bowl's base and a cheap plastic coral statue sits in the center. On the other side is a stack of 20 half graded quizzes from his class. Our narrator is a high school teacher in Vancouver. The papers are from his Introduction to North American History course. Let me know if I need to make up some factoids to add to the quiz. On top of the quizzes are three empty bottles of Korean soju. Please refer to attached photos for reference on the bottles design and logo.

Narrator (V.O.): She offered to change strategy. Try an experimental drug. Add my name to another list. Could give me another year.

Page 1, Panel 5

BATHROOM. We can see part of the narrator's face underneath the tub full of water. A thick straw is between the narrator's lips and extends to the surface acting like a snorkel. The straw is from the BIG THIRSTY from Panel 1 on this page.

Narrator (V.O.): I mentioned this to my coping counselor. He supports the idea. "Could lead to remission," he said. "You never know."

Page 1, Panel 6

BEDROOM. An open shoe box sits on top of the unmade bed against the wall. Above the bed is a closed window with the drapes drawn. We can see the contents of the shoe box as if the narrator positioned the box for anyone to notice upon first entering. Inside are about 20 audio cassette tapes within their jewel cases. On the top of each audio cassette's jewel case is a label marked with a date. The audio tapes are organized chronologically into neat rows with gentle care. The earliest date is June 8, 1978 and the latest is September 3, 1979. Depending on which is easier to draw, there is a sheet of stationary paper that's folded several times either inside the shoe box or beside it. Written on the outside of the folded paper is a note in tiny, nervous letters:

Remember Me

This is to be inferred by the reader as a suicide note. However, it is supposed to be the list made on New Year's Eve mentioned in Page 3, Panel 1.

Narrator (V.O.): He asked me if making these audio diaries is helping.

Page 1, Panel 7

Long shot. Straight down perspective. God's eye view of the tiny bathroom. Our main character is naked in a tub full of water, submerged, including head. Both eyes are open. Penis uncircumcised. He is a South Korean immigrant in his early 50s; thin from the year and half of radiation and chemo, but with an excess of skin from losing 23 kilos (50 or so pounds); and about 1.57 meters (5 ft. 2 in.) tall. Many months of chemo has made him bald and fragile looking. As shown in Page 1, Panel 5, the narrator has a thick straw in his mouth acting as a snorkel. On the closed toilet seat lid next to the tub is a cassette recorder. The cassette recorder is larger than what we are used to in the 21st century. Since this is 1979, the model would be similar to a Panasonic RQ-409S or an ITT SL54. The recorder runs on batteries and has an internal microphone so no external mic or power chord are needed. If you can draw it, the spool on the cassette on the tape recorder should be on the left side. This shows that it is a new cassette tape being recorded. Also, if possible, the record button should be pushed down.

Narrator (V.O.): I'm not holding my breath.

Page Two

Splash page of the betta fish swimming inside the fish bowl. The image is broken up into numerous panels. The more panels the better. Tiny panels containing something arbitrary such as the fish's fin and no text would be ideal. The page is a visual metaphor for the narrator's emotional and mental fragility and instability. The narrator acknowledges this metaphor with the below line, formed from a combination of dialogue from Panel 9.

Breaking into a thousand pieces, yet trapped and helpless inside my own body.

That quote should be the focus on the page's panel layout. Emotion, not logic. However, please note there are chunks of dialogue that need to be included. The panels with dialogue are marked below. As mentioned these are the minimum number of panels needed for this page. More is encouraged. Please leave room for the letterer and arrange the dialogued panels so the reader can follow the intended order.

And yes, a splash page of a fish is a dumb joke so I won't make it.

Page 2, Panel 1

Narrator (V.O.): I've been listening to the old tapes. Starting with the first.

Page 2, Panel 2

Narrator (V.O.): Most are in English, but in the more difficult entries I slide back into Korean.

Page 2, Panel 3

Narrator (V.O.): The early ones are filled with my attempts at stability. Suggestions from the Coping with Cancer book.

Page 2, Panel 4

Narrator (V.O.): Cooking classes. Painting with water colors. Gardening.

Page 2, Panel 5

Narrator (V.O.): By December I needed coping from the coping methods.

Page 2, Panel 6

Narrator (V.O.): These small distractions couldn't make life disappear.

Page 2, Panel 7

Narrator (V.O.): The countless hours of radiation.

Narrator (V.O.): Headaches.

Narrator (V.O.): Hair loss.

Narrator (V.O.): Always being tired.

Page 2, Panel 8

Narrator (V.O.): Every day I was breaking into a thousand more pieces. Dissolving slowly into nothing.

Page 2, Panel 9

Narrator (V.O.): You don't know how painful it feels as your whole being fragments day after day after day.

Narrator (V.O.): Shattering into less than nothing.

Narrator (V.O.): Yet you're trapped and helpless inside your own fragile body.

Page 2, Panel 10

Narrator (V.O.): So, so helpless.

Page 2, Panel 11

Narrator (V.O.): It's funny. For a long time, feeding my betta fish Imugi was the only thing that helped.

Page Three

For this page, Panels 1-6 are Imugi swimming in the bathtub while our narrator is off panel, below. Panel 7 shows our narrator finally free, craving the feeling of air rising and falling within his chest. In my thumbnails, the page is split into 3 tiers: Panels 1-3 take up the top tier of the page, Panel 4-6 the middle tier, and Panel 7 the whole bottom tier. This purpose of this format is to allow the bottom panel enough space for the largest impact. In my mind, the other logical structure would be two columns of four, except the bottom panels are merged. However, this is the suggested format of Page 1. Please avoid this 2 by 4 panel layout since I don't want there to be a link between these two pages where there isn't one.

* Note to artists and letterer: Since this page is a bit wordy, maybe it would be better to have the text for Panels 1-6 at the top in one text box. Thoughts? I split the texts within each panel into multiple text boxes in order to simulate the rhythm of the narrator talking. However, since there is a large amount of text in Panels 1-6, especially Panel 6, it might be more effective to go this approach so the images of Imugi swimming are not covered up by text. Also, I tried condensing the text more but couldn't because I'm not a good writer.

Page 3, Panel 1

Imugi is swimming on the left side of the panel. Calm. Not a care in the world.

Narrator (V.O.): On New Year's Eve I wrote a list. Pursuits I'd like to try in case I **khff* *khuuhf**
kfhuuuuughhh

Narrator (V.O.): Sorry.

Page 3, Panel 2

Imugi is swimming along the bottom center of the panel, looking down at something below and off panel.

Narrator (V.O.): I got to say.

Narrator (V.O.): It's a strange feeling.

Narrator (V.O.): Writing down things you know you will never accomplish.

Page 3, Panel 3

A bubble has floated up to the middle of the panel. On the left side is Imugi, fins flared out in agitation. The bubble is an air bubble from the narrator as implied by the dialogue in Panel 5 on this page.

Narrator (V.O.): Volunteer to teach Korean.

Narrator (V.O.): Be more engaged with my high school students.

Narrator (V.O.): Visit my parents' graves back in Incheon.

Narrator (V.O.): Find love again.

Page 3, Panel 4

Imugi has dashed through the bubble and is now on the right side of the panel. A pop SFX is not needed, but there is a burst where the bubble was. In the bottom of the panel are tiny air bubbles, almost unnoticeable if the reader isn't paying attention.

Narrator (V.O.): Two weeks into January, I attempted one: Snorkel with the fishes.

Narrator (V.O.): It was still winter. And with no extra funds thanks to medical bills, I was able to find a creative solution.

Page 3, Panel 5

The tiny air bubbles have multiplied and fill the bottom third of the panel. Some medium sized air bubbles are scattered throughout the cluster. Imugi is near the top, fins flared once more.

Narrator (V.O.): I filled the bath. Plopped Imugi in. Strapped on a kid's snorkel. And plunged under.

Narrator (V.O.): The cheap toy store snorkel kept clogging.

Narrator (V.O.): So I removed it, inhaled deep, and returned.

Page 3, Panel 6

Small, medium, and large air bubbles have overtaken most of the panel. Imugi can be seen helpless within the mess.

Narrator (V.O.): I lay there.

Narrator (V.O.): Submerged.

Narrator (V.O.): Weightless.

Narrator (V.O.): Seconds stretching into months.

Narrator (V.O.): Into years.

Narrator (V.O.): Years I didn't have.

Narrator (V.O.): Overtaken by a peculiar peace as the burning in my chest swelled.

Narrator (V.O.): Bloomed.

Narrator (V.O.): Burst.

Page 3, Panel 7

Long shot. Hands gripping the tub's edge, our narrator breaks through the water, mouth agape, hungry for air. Due to the treatment, he is bald and frail, yet still appears slightly overweight. Remember, since bath tubs are designed for people not to drown, his knees are sticking out of the water. He had to sit near the tub's edge, legs scrunched up, in order to have enough room to lay down and not clunk his head against the tub's other edge.

Narrator (V.O.): Until I was screaming for Life.

Narrator (V.O.): Born anew.

Page Four

9 panels. 3 by 3 grid. The 3 panels in each row are linked visually. A breakdown is below.

Panels 1, 2, 3: Match cuts having the right profile of our narrator's head with his hands raised. Panel 3 is our narrator's head, but his doctor's hand. We can tell it is not our narrator's since it is a woman's hand.

Panels 4, 5, 6: A continuous line stretching across the center of all 3 panels. The line moves within the panel, but starts and ends around the center.

Panels 7, 8, 9: Slow pull that progresses all 3 bottom panels. From a bust shot to a close up to an extreme close up. There is a plenty of text in these panels so let me know how feasible this is.

Page 4, Panel 1

Right profile. Our narrator is in the tub, smiling ear to ear. In his cupped hands is a little pool of water with Imugi swimming in it.

Narrator (V.O.): Those first few breaths were so rich. So pure. I felt solid again. As if all my shattered slivers of self were mended.

Narrator (V.O.): I couldn't stop laughing.

Page 4, Panel 2

Right profile. Outside, bundled up against the Canadian winter chill, carving an ice sculpture with a metal pick. The sculpture is almost complete. The sculpture's shape and design is not important. It could be a dog or a flower or whatever is easiest. As mentioned above, the narrator's head and hands should be in the same position as Panel 1. The hands are performing a different action, but should be in the same area as Panel 1.

Narrator (V.O.): Classes resumed. I had twice as much energy than before winter break. I began exercising again. Eating more. Completed two more items on the list. Even some hair grew back.

Page 4, Panel 3

Right profile. An illuminated MRI scan of our narrator's skull. A pointer, held by his doctor, points to a small mass near the Clivus section of the brain. As mentioned above, the hand is a woman's. As mentioned above, the narrator's head should be in the same position as Panel 1 and 2. The doctor's hand should be in the same area as Panel 1 and 2.

Narrator (V.O.): It didn't last. In March, they found another lump. Benign, but the radiation increased. The weakness returned. The energy zapped out of me.

Page 4, Panel 4

Medium shot. Similar to Panel 1, our narrator is standing in the running shower, hands open in front of him. The thin hair he'd grown over the past few months is wrapped around his fingers, wet and soggy. The small achievement of progress toward health drips and dangles in his open palms. On his face, shower water mixes with tears.

Narrator (V.O.): My body was destroying itself from the inside. This time, I wasn't splintering or fracturing into pieces, but unraveling. Loosing myself in tangled clumps.

Page 4, Panel 5

Lifeline on monitor.

Narrator (V.O.): Truth was, the disease was winning.

Page 4, Panel 6

Rushing bathtub faucet. The tub near empty except for the first waters collecting into a small stream in the center, stretching from end to end of the tub/panel. No Imugi.

Narrator (V.O.): Around May, my current coping counselor was assigned to me. His advice rarely helped. Always some cheesy suggestion from that book. Only one coping method ever offered me reprieve.

Page 4, Panel 7

Bust shot. Our narrator is under water, straw in mouth, eyes closed.

Narrator (V.O.): By the start of summer, I was diving in at least once a week. Adjusting technique. Experimenting. Seeking new methods to extend the point of release. The rush of rebirth.

Page 4, Panel 8

Close up. Zoomed in on our narrator's face: straw filled mouth, nose, cheek, and eyes. He is still under water, but now his eyes are open.

Narrator (V.O.): Adult sized snorkels didn't work. Too bulky. Instead I started using straws after watching the neighbor kids shoot spit balls. Sampling different widths for the right balance of give and take.

Page 4, Panel 9

Extreme close up of one of his eyes. The pupil and iris dominate the non-text space in the panel.

* Note to letterer: For this panel, I was thinking the second chunk of dialogue be placed at the bottom right corner for better page turning. Thoughts?

Narrator (V.O.): Turning off the lights added a new layer to the experience. Enhancing my perception by relying on my other senses. Recently, I found it simpler to remove all the fuses. To be fully bathed in darkness.

Narrator (V.O.): I admit, I may enjoy this too much.

Page Five

The last page occurs several days after the first page. The images between both pages mirror each other. Panels 1,2,3,6 should be the same. The slight differences in Panels 4,5,7 are listed in their descriptions. This would reshuffle panels that the reader is familiar with after new knowledge gained through the journey. Also, it reflects the dialogue in Panel 6 of

No end. No beginning.

Page 5, Panel 1

Image is the same as Page 1, Panel 1.

Narrator (V.O.): So why now? Why am I sharing so much of myself with you, my new friend?

Page 5, Panel 2

Image is the same as Page 1, Panel 2.

Narrator (V.O.): Well, let's be honest. If you're listening to this then you already know why.

Page 5, Panel 3

Image is the same as Page 1, Panel 3.

Narrator (V.O.): Each dive made me stronger. Learning to survive with so little. Yet in the end, the radiation drained me into this brittle husk.

Page 5, Panel 4

Similar image is as Page 1, Panel 4 except Imugi has swum to a different part of the bowl.

Narrator (V.O.): My existence was a loop. A continuous cycle of near death followed by near birth separated by segments of near life.

Page 5, Panel 5

Similar image is as Page 1, Panel 5 except the straw is no longer in the mouth and has floated out of frame.

Narrator (V.O.): Death.

Narrator (V.O.): Life.

Narrator (V.O.): Is there a difference?

Page 5, Panel 6

Image is the same as Page 1, Panel 6.

Narrator (V.O.): Maybe this life is one of many linked little illusions as my grandmother always told me.
No end. No beginning.

Page 5, Panel 7

Similar image is as Page 1, Panel 7 except the straw has floated away from his mouth and is near his feet. Also, if you were able to draw the spool of magnetic tape within the cassette that was within the cassette player, then the tape should be on the opposite/right side since the tape is done. As well as the record button returning to neutral position since the recording is complete.

Narrator (V.O.): I'm not holding my breath.

SFX (little water droplets exploding from the SFX, as designated by the equal signs): =Plop=