

A drink with Death

by William Holmes IV

He turned the key in the lock and opened the door. To his horror he saw a brick wall with the words of an unknown language written in crimson paint. He passed his lantern over the letters in the cave. Only now was his shock wearing off from the great oak door, the wall, and the tiring journey all morning to discover this enigma. He realized two things. The first was that the key was left in the door because the brick wall was not worth the effort to break down. The second was that he must return with tools to get the impediment.

"I will return tonight with chisel in hand," Christophe said to himself.

He promptly made his way out through the tunnels. Later that night he returned with his hammer, chisel, and lantern. After traversing the cave, he arrived at the door. "Strange," he muttered, "I don't remember shutting the door."

As Christophe twisted the rudimentary iron key he had heard a murmur, or so he thought. He passed through the great oak door and set his lantern on the ground beside the wall. Hammer and chisel in hand, placed on a brick near the base, Christophe struck the wall, and with the grand echo, he heard a scream from the other side, "Help me! Get me out!"

Christophe steeled himself and at a frantic pace, he cracked and chipped away the base of the walls as the shouts and screams continued. "Let me out! Let me out! Help me, please..."

The shrieks were piercing now.

After a short while, Christophe struck a weak spot and the bricks swooned and crumbled. The dust and dirt swirled like smoke. Exhausted he peered through to the other side and was struck by a sudden, astonishing silence. He picked up his lantern with haste and crossed the threshold of where the wall once was, and he saw a skeleton chained to the cave wall where the tunnel ended. Christophe wearily staggered towards the skeleton and noticed a bottle of red wine just out of the dead man's reach. He set his lantern beside the bottle and picked up the wine. He uncorked the half-empty bottle, smelled the contents and took a deep swig. He studied the skeleton while replacing the cork and at that moment he heard the great oak door slam shut. He glanced sharply behind him and saw to his horror that the wall had reformed, brick by brick, expertly sealed.

"Everything's alright," Christophe said aloud, "I still have my tools. I can get through."

But soon Christophe realized his tools were on the other side. After a few moments, the lantern began to wane and flicker, then abruptly extinguished itself.

In the blinding dark, Christophe was alone with Death. Death strode up to him, put a hand on Christophe's shoulder and whispered in his ear, "Welcome back."

Master of our Fates

by Ron Sanford

Winter is creeping in little by little
Past lessons up for grabs
Not all is lost if we preserve it
Still we never seem to learn

Can we be like the snowbirds and
Hide from destruction's wake?

Can we live like the ants do and
Rest before it's too late?

Some will be left teetering on a ledge
Men grasping for straws upon a dry lake

The best thing we can do is be prepared
We know how to survive so there is no fear
Although we are not the master of our fates

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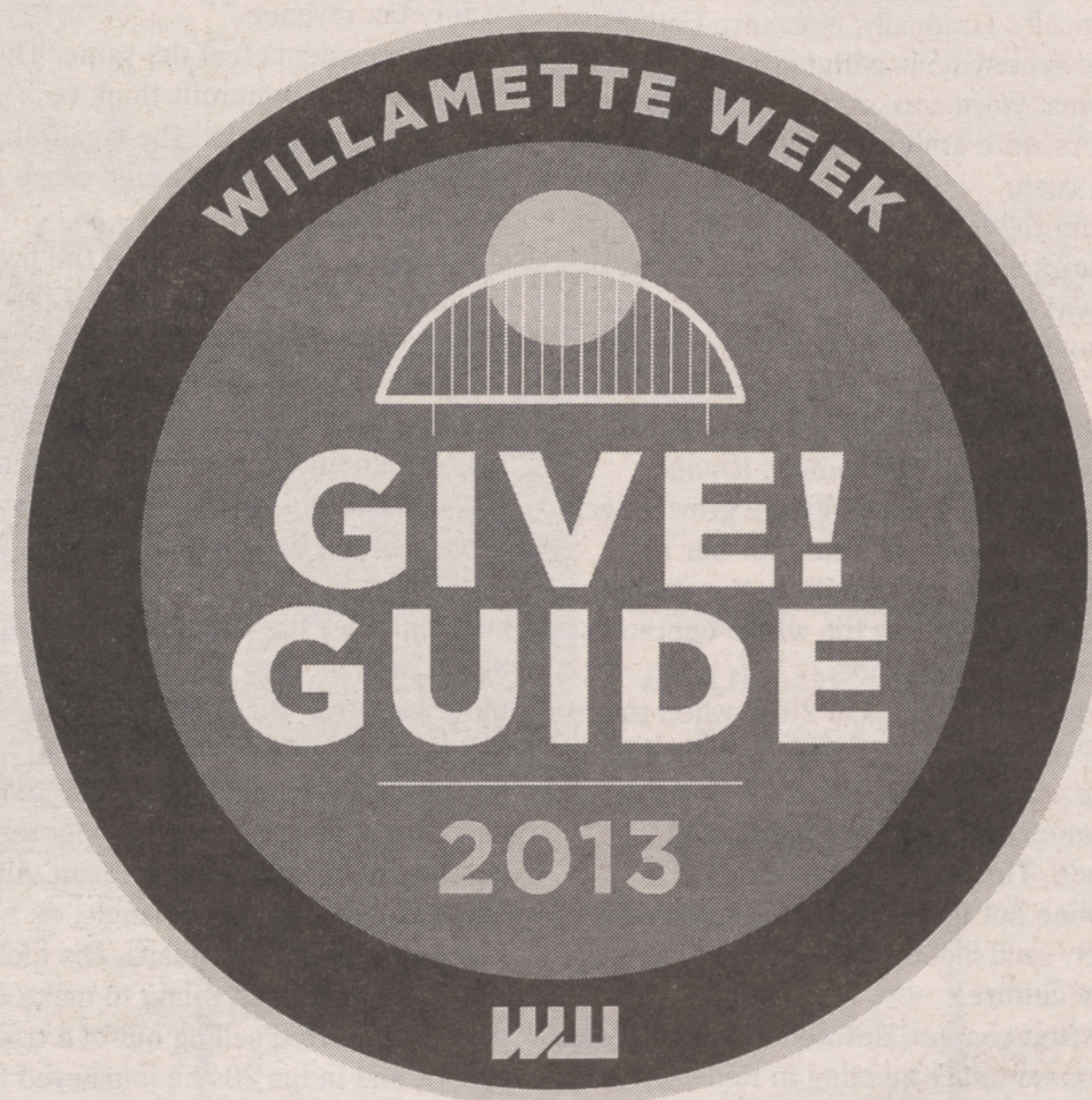
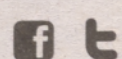
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