

The Blotter

Magazine
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The Uneasy Alliance Who Make Eye Contact While Someone's Blessing the Meal

Free in Asheville, Athens, Atlanta, Chapel Hill, Charlottesville, Durham, Greensboro,
Rocktober 2006 Hillsborough, New York City, and Raleigh



Roger That. B. Seckinger Ash and Kyle Steele Are Go for Short Fiction. Artwork by Lynne Clarke is Go. Poesy and Prose by McKenzie, Kerri French, Margot Considine, and Denver Hill are Go. Comix by One Neck: Go. All Systems Go. Repeat: We Are Go for Launch. Over.

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Cover art by Lynne Clarke See pp. 8-9 for more from this artist.

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This magazine may contain typos or bad words

Items Worth Mentioning
from the desk of Johnny Pence**A Glimpse of the Future**

I wrote last month that the end of the magazine was coming sometime, but we weren't sure when. We got a lot of great responses and offers to help, and are tracking them down the best we can.

Thanks to everyone who wrote in, either with an offer to help or just to say how they felt about it—because nobody said, "Good! You suck!"

The conclusions we've come to are these: I will retire as editor sometime soon, in a month or four, and our old pal Garry Somers (or M. Garrison, as he's known in print) will take over.

Financially, currently, we can afford to print into mid-late 2007 or so. Garry and Marty will work together to see if they can't do better with the money and keep it alive longer.

The books division is still a possibility too, and we're looking at ways to publish the three titles we currently have handshake agreements about.

If everything works out well enough, I may have spoken too quickly. If everything goes on at its current pace, we'll probably have to close up about this time next year, give or take.

So let's not worry for now.

World Peace

You want to hear my plan for world peace? Here it is:

We organize a massive exchange of grandmas from all over the world. Pair them with policymakers from countries that are at war with the grandma's home country. For instance, American grandmas in Iraq, Afghan grandmas here in the Whitehouse.

Let the grandmas criticize and preach and lay guilt trips on the politicians and warlords, all while feeding them with good home-cooked meals. Smack President Bush with a wooden spoon and tell him he's a bully and a coward. Get Kim Jong Il all fat on collards and country ham and make him feel like a disappointment. Knit a sweater so Osama doesn't catch cold in those caves, and here's a chicken leg in foil. You can eat it later.

Nobody can make war on grandmas, and grandmas will whip an evildoer into shape in no time. And for heavens' sakes, it looks like you haven't eaten in months. Sit down and let me fix you something.

After the first phase achieves some cessation in the violence and atrocities, we then start pairing the Grandma Corps with college kids. Quit smoking. Cut your hair. Let me introduce you to my niece; she'd make you a good wife. Eat your meatballs.

The future is with our grandmas. Treat them well.

—ediot@blotterrag.com

Hurricane Priaptyline

by B. Seckinger Ash

Hurricane Priaptyline was the first storm of the season. Barely a Category Two, it was still watched by millions of people all over North America. Six months earlier, the storm-designation contract had been granted to the highest corporate bidder—a previously obscure medical research company called Drexel Pharmaceuticals. After five years of testing a breakthrough erectile dysfunction pill, Priaptyline, the company was finally granted approval by the FDA. For the executives at Drexel, the storm was a perfect opportunity to introduce the versatile pill. Unlike other ED medicines, Priaptyline came in two versions: Priaptyline RX, the conventional solution for ED, and Priaptyline SX, which, along with providing the same services as RX, also renders the user's ejaculate sterile for twelve hours while providing a temporary treatment for ED. Priaptyline had the potential to corner two markets at once: the erectile and contraceptive markets by appealing to impotent males who desired functioning carnal facilities, but who lacked the financial or emotional stability for children, as well as the men who wanted to propagate and multiply, but were in need of a durable garden shovel to help them spread their seed.

Drexel put every last penny into winning the bid, including the lucrative stock options of the executives. It was just enough to beat out two rivaling soda companies and a telecommunications conglomerate. But everything was riding on the hurricane. Financial

journalists and advertising analysts mocked and criticized Drexel when news of the deal hit the press the day after they won the contract. And when Drexel refused to release any information concerning the drug, media curiosity only fed the indignant business writers around Wall Street. Many thought the critics had a legitimate argument: Drexel, after all, was placing its future existence on the success of a marketing technique that had never been tested.

Whatever worries or doubts Drexel had were exacerbated by the lack of communication from Miles Price and his marketing team in Miami. Upon signing the contract, Miles thanked the board of directors at Drexel over a conference call, told them to sit back and enjoy the storm, and reassured them that the Wall Street critics didn't know a market from a monkey dick.

"Without data, the corporate analyst is lost in a vortex of indecision," Miles said. "Without static, those hacks are stagnant, suspended, and yes, impotent—pun intended, gentlemen—in the absence of measurable statistics and charts. But bell curves deal in fool's gold and dried-up dog turds; me, I quarry for bullion in the rich lands of uncertainty. The market is a black box, gentlemen. You can see what gets put in and what comes out, but you'll never see what happens inside. I heard an analyst tell me once; he said 'A flashlight shows you nothing unless it's got batteries!' And I said, 'Therein lies the problem you son-of-an-upside-down-bitch, cause every last one of us is blind.' You see, I assume nothing, therefore I

The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

Sounds Like Berkeley to Me

It seemed like I was in Berkeley, Ca, or a similar city—I had decided to go for a drive to send a letter I needed to mail and find something to eat. For some reason I stopped by a park where I saw some tough-looking kids hanging out, and even though I don't smoke pot anymore, I somehow found myself smoking a joint in my car with a kid about 16 years old.

After a while, we notice a police car drive by the car and decide to go get a sandwich at a deli. As we're sitting and eating our sandwiches, I notice the cop enter the deli, the kid does too and gets all nervous, saying he has to run because he has some money he's stolen on him.

This freaks me out, and as I'm trying to talk him out of it and get him to be calm, I notice that the cop who's walking toward us isn't a cop but the counter guy from the deli.

I'm surprised because I see that the deli guy is crying as he walks quickly past us.

The kid I'm with abruptly gets up and runs out after him.

I get up to leave and go to my car which is behind the deli; as I get near the car I see that the kid I was with and the deli guy are crying together and I realize that they are father and son. I give the kid a look like I understand.

I feel awkward having to walk past them to get to my car and I also have to walk past some gangster-type kids who look nervous until they realize I'm not interested in whatever they're up to. I just want to leave.

—J.B., Asheville

Please send excerpts from your dream journals to Jenny at mermaid@blotterrarr.com. If nothing else, we love to read them. We won't publish your whole name.

flow through eddies in spite of turbulence. The market is a spiral thing that you should jump through, like art. Goddamn, listen to me, somebody should be writing this down. Fear ye not, gentlemen, fear ye not."

Miles pulled some strings with a few contacts in the Pentagon and procured a thirty year old C-130 from the Air Force, a robust cargo hauler once used by the Weather Reconnaissance Squadron to fly into hurricane-force storms. He kept the 130J fueled and ready to go at a landing strip outside of Miami, waiting for a low-pressure system to develop over the Atlantic. He kept a special flight crew on-hand to be ready to fly it at a moments notice.

In the hours before Hurricane Priaptyline formed, Miles suited up alongside the pilot, co-pilot, and navigator and joined them for close-up look at his latest money-

maker, his raging billboard, a vortex for the venture capitalist.

"You sure you want to do this?" asked the pilot. "It gets pretty rough up there."

"Goody, goody," Miles said, "Don't worry about me. Up high is where I belong."

The 130J was a tough and deliberate plane, the VW of the sky, able to stay in flight for over ten hours. Up high above the clouds, Miles spotted Priaptyline's eye wall, a still-forming cotton waterfall. The crew dropped tiny devices equipped with parachutes that disappeared into the vast mouth of the storm. Miles seemed to fall into a trance, gazing out at the horizon, lost in the turbulent white noise of the air shooting through the fuselage.

They landed eight hours later and the crew began gathering their data. When the pilot sat a laptop next to Miles to show him, Miles

didn't bat an eye at it; he got up and started to leave the plane, his mind elsewhere, a tiny post-coital smile on his face.

"Don't you want to see the data?" asked the pilot.

"What data?" Miles sighed.

"That we got from the flight," he said, "wind speed, humidity levels...with this we might be able to predict the path of the storm."

"What'd you think?" laughed the navigator. "You think we go flying into hurricanes for the wind-burn?"

"You don't? The fact that you'll get to do this for a living makes me want to shit my pants with envy. Ew, what time is it? Later gents, I'm off to a banquet."

Miles hand-picked three female actresses to be the anchors during the storm broadcasting, all of whom possessed a notable amount of sex appeal. They were models and actresses who'd found

They told you that nobody likes a smart ass?



That's because they never met

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most of their work in late night infomercials, selling everything from conversations with vixens to penis pumps and dating books. Miles retained three of them as independent contractors, dressed them in cleavage-friendly dresses, one red, one white, and one blue. He had them add sultry liltts in their speech that coated words like "air pressure" and "wind speed" with audible pheromones. There was the older, buxom 30-something with red hair and glasses; a dark-skinned Latin-American beauty, late twenties, her Amazonian curves on full display; she had a smoky voice that, coupled with her charming accent, turned sentences into a sexually charged pine. The third anchor was a young Asian girl of nineteen. Her English was flawless and crisp, her skin smooth as porcelain, her hair done up shamelessly in pig-tails.

The minute the storm reached official hurricane status, the Weather Service Channel cut to an entirely different newsroom; the camera panned sidelong, bringing Maggie Beavers, the redhead anchorwoman, into focus. A chorus of drums cascaded in the background; superimposed on the screen: Hurricane Update, brought to you by Drexel Pharmaceuticals.

"Hello and welcome to the Weather Service Channel's special storm coverage. I'm Maggie Beavers. Meteorologists have confirmed that tropical storm Priaptyline has reached hurricane status, and we'll be bringing you minute-by-minute updates after this short commercial break, so stay tuned."

Commercial: A crowd of people are gathered around a roulette table in a fancy casino. They watch the wheel spin and cheer like mad. The camera follows a kid wearing jeans, a t-shirt, and flip-flops as he

walks up to the table. The other people, dressed in fancy gowns, tuxedos, and fur coats, roll their eyes at him and laugh mockingly. The young man is undeterred, and he places a hundred dollar chip on Red 35. The roulette spins and the ball hits Red 35. Everyone at the table is floored. The kid smiles as the dealer slides him a massive amount of chips. Suddenly, the camera pans out, goes through a collage of digital theatrics—warp speed into the future—whereupon we see a grown up version of the kid in the middle of the trading floor on Wall Street, buying and selling, yelling and screaming. Cue Voice-Over—"The market is waiting for few more winners. What are you waiting on?"

The storm coverage returned following the advertisement. "Welcome back to the Drexel Pharmaceutical storm update. I'm Maggie Beavers. We're receiving reports that Hurricane Priaptyline has been upgraded to a Category Two storm and is showing no signs of softening as it pounds deeper into the Gulf. Let's go to our correspondent Maria Fuego who is in south Florida fighting the rain. Maria?"

The cameras cut to Maria, the Latino vixen, who was really in the studio next door standing in front of a virtual background of an ocean and surrounded by industrial fans arranged so that the air swirled around her. She fights to keep her thin skirt from catching air, her shapely thighs enhancing the footage. The screen behind her projects a rather sunny beach with dark ominous clouds in the distance. Despite the wind, Maria kept a smile on her face.

"Thanks Maggie, I'm standing on a beach here in Key West and it is extremely windy as you can see. Authorities are watching

Priaptyline closely, partly to be cautious, but mainly out of a sense of awe and wonder. It's Priaptyline's sheer stamina that is baffling experts, but they are also intrigued with the lack of real danger it poses. The meteorologists are able to observe without anxiety, and in the process they are really taking something meaningful away from the experience. Back to you, Maggie."

"Thanks Maria, and don't you go and get swept off your feet by Priaptyline."

Maria giggled. "I'll try my best but I can't promise anything. There are single men crawling all over the place down here!"

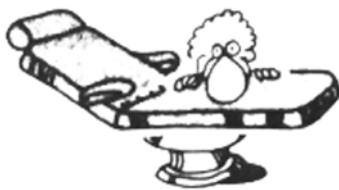
The camera came back to the studio and Maggie shook her head and smiled as she stacked a few pieces of paper. "Coming up after the break, we'll talk to Kim Davenport over at the Hurricane Analyst Headquarters and get an update on Priaptyline's path, so grab some popcorn and stay tuned."

Commercial: A boy arrives at school, sits in his desk looking drowsy and unhappy. He looks at the chalkboard, the camera panning over to it—it says: Standardized Testing Day. Cut To—a thick, ominous test booklet is dropped on the kid's desk along with a bubble answering sheet. The teacher tells the students to begin testing, and the kid sighs and rolls his eyes. Cut To—the teacher sits at her desk doing paperwork. The slight sound of a coin being flipped in the air can be heard, and from the view at the front of the room, the boy is hidden in the back. Then a glint of light can be seen bobbing up and back down, the sound of the coin getting louder.

Cut To—The kid is flipping a coin: landing on heads, he bubbles in A; tails he bubbles in B.

Howard L. Shareff, DDS

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Suddenly, the camera pans out, goes through a collage of digital theatrics—warp speed into the future—whereupon we see a grown up version of the kid. He is trading hedge funds, derivatives, and buying/selling futures in a large, sassy office, a giant coin hanging from the wall behind his desk. Cue Voice Over—Show me a man who is ready to tackle risk, and I'll show you a man who leaves work early to play golf at Pebble, Pinehurst, or perhaps somewhere more remote, like..." Cut To—a lavish golf course on the coast of some foreign country. Cue Voice Over— "...Spain..." The camera pans down and we see the grown man walking off a putting green toward his golf cart where a beautiful Spanish woman sits, giving him a sexy smile. Cue Voice Over— "...where there is no such thing as a bad score—no matter what you shoot on the course."

Back to Maggie Beavers in the studio: "We're now joined by Kim Davenport, who will give us an update on the potential paths of Priaptyline. Kim?"

"Hi Maggie. Gosh, I'm sooo jealous. Here I am in the studio while our co-worker is enjoying the thrills of being up close and personal with Priaptyline."

"That Maria," laughed Maggie, "she never slows down! Any single guys going after her better have plenty of energy if they want to satisfy her appetite for adventure."

"I sure wish I was surrounded by an island full of single guys with Priaptyline about to set in," Kim said, cocking her head to the side, jiggling her pigtails.

Maggie smiled and continued the report. "So, Kim, can you tell us where we might expect Priaptyline to go from here?"

"That's a great question.

Normally, predicting the path of a storm turns out to be a lesson in futility. But it seems that there are two options—both of which offer minimal threat, by the way—that most of the analysts have seemed to narrow down. The first scenario is that Priaptyline will make its way toward southeast Texas where, as you know, there has been an ongoing draught that is taking a toll on so many farms. If Priaptyline hits the coast there, it will most likely stimulate a pleasurable pounding of rain long overdue. And this will no doubt revitalize, fertilize, and bring new life to that barren region. Then there's scenario two, that it meanders around the Gulf until it climaxes. This would allow us to enjoy the beauty of nature without having to worry about the implications of damage or unexpected surprises that spring to life when penetrating unprotected areas inland."

"Sounds like with Priaptyline, everybody wins."

"You can say that again. And for those of you who are tuned in to our coverage and who might be suffering through your own metaphorical drought, by simply calling the 800 number at the bottom of the screen, Priaptyline will come all the way to you. Doctors are standing by to tell you more about Priaptyline RX and Priaptyline SX, and well as providing a free diagnosis and satisfactory prognosis, both completed over the phone, and all in less than ten minutes. Call now, and in less than an hour, a prescription of Priaptyline will be making its way toward your door via first class mail. Twenty-four hours from now, you and the one you love could be making hurricanes between the sheets, and in the privacy of your own home. Call the 800 number at the bottom of

the screen. Physicians are standing

by. Ask them if Priaptyline is right for you."

The 130J wasn't the only plane Miles purchased as an investment for his hurricane venture. There was also a matter of two dozen "firefighter" planes, each capable of holding a few thousand gallons of water.

A dozen coastal towns from Florida to southeast Texas were designated hot-spots, most of them being heavily populated by retired senior citizens living in condominium complexes specially designed for the golden years. Miles had a team of chemists acquire a large amount of Priaptyline, which they ground up into a fine powder, mixed with spring water, and filled the tanks of every plane in their arsenal. Once Priaptyline hit the middle of the Gulf, the fleet of planes headed toward their assigned towns and released the water directly over the retirement communities in a light drizzling mist.

Less than twelve hours later it was reduced to Tropical Storm Priaptyline, and only when it faded into a cluster of thunderstorms did the advertisement end, whereupon the Weather Service Channel shifted back to its regular programming format. By the time that happened, Miles had already bid out all the Storm Designation contracts for the remainder of the

year's hurricane season.

Hours later, when the broadcast was beaming out the message of Priaptyline to homes throughout the nation, Drexel salesman standing by to answer questions about Priaptyline experienced a influx of calls—all of them coming from the twelve coastal towns—from men and women, all wanting to know how fast they can get their hands on some of that Priaptyline.

In the days following Priaptyline, Miles' company was bombarded with calls from companies, all anxious to put in a bid for the next hurricane. The scientists who Miles hired to forecast the number of potential storm systems that season went to work cooking as much data as they could, Miles having offered them a significant bonus each additional hurricane they could predict.

"What's the use in predicting extra storms? Who's going to pay for a storm that never comes?" Yleee asked.

"They'll pay a small percentage for the hope alone," said Miles.

And the companies were lining up to do just that. When the scientists' official forecast came to fifteen storms, Miles knew—as well as the heads of the companies—that they'd be lucky to see seven or eight. Nevertheless, Miles bid out the first eight before putting the remaining seven up for

bid, only these bidding started at a much lower price, as there was a smaller percentage chance of them coming to fruition. The bids, therefore, were not for the hurricane, but to win one of three spots for the purchasing option of the hurricane: if it never developed, Miles' company kept the money, and if it did happen to surface, the top three bidders who purchase buying options for each hurricane had the opportunity to re-bid in a conference-call auction to win the exclusive rights, with the price equaling ten or fifteen times the amount of the option alone.

No matter how many hurricanes cropped up each season, Miles and company made a hefty profit. But that wasn't enough for Miles. He hated the pervasive lack of supply needed to keep up with demand; hated that he couldn't produce the amount of hurricanes that his heart—and the market—so desired.

Miles' computer programming division was put to work developing a hurricane simulation program that, when plugged into the National Weather System's computer grid, could trick the mainframe into detecting small, rapid hurricanes in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean, and the Atlantic Ocean. These systems would appear almost

cont'd., p. 10

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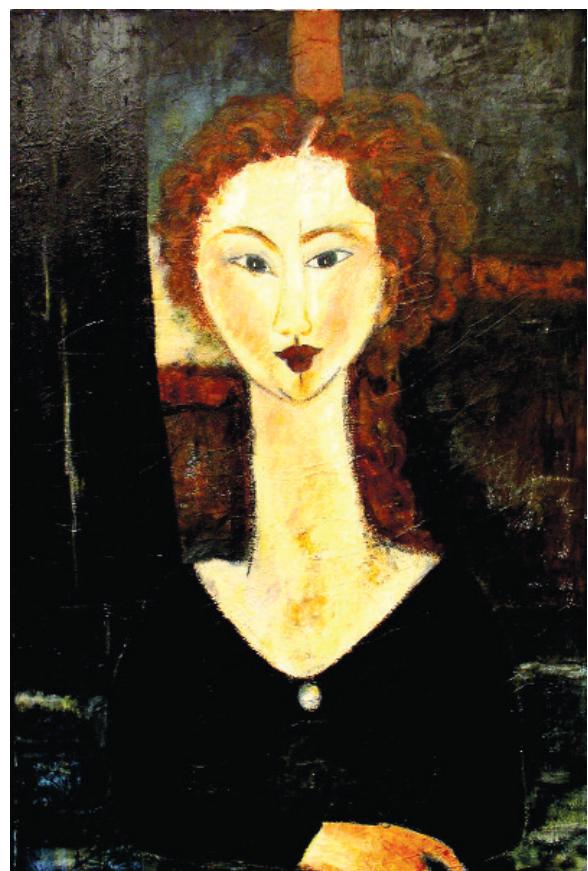
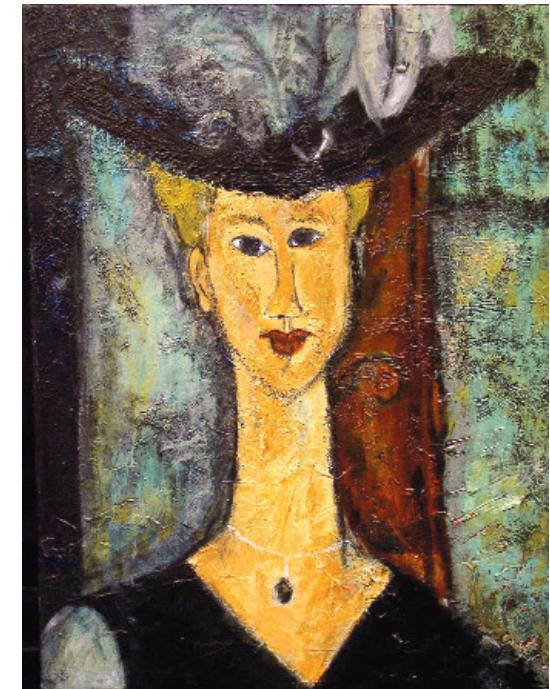
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instantaneously and last from two to three hours before rapidly disseminating without having damaged or flooded any of the coastal mainland.

This was the answer to Miles' loathsome supply problem: if Mother Nature refused to increase production, he'd just have to intervene and summon the four winds himself via virtual replication.

The simulations seemed to work like magic, with Miles able to procure contracts from the many companies willing to pay big bucks for just a few hours of such grand

exposure as having a hurricane named after their product. Of course, none of them knew that the systems weren't real, although none of them would have cared.

Trouble surfaced, however, when Miles' computer programmers got lazy one day and accidentally reversed the natural counter-clockwise spin of their simulated hurricane, sending it whirling clockwise. Unaware of their mistake,

Hurricane

P.A.S.T.—Protestants Against Secular Trendsetting, a conservative special interest group with

deep pockets and an anti-progressive agenda—became the first hurricane to be both clockwise and counter-conventional, not quite the representation P.A.S.T. was hoping for. The nonexistent Hurricane P.A.S.T. spun clockwise for nearly forty-five minutes before one of Miles' programmers caught sight of it and repaired it. The meteorologists buffered the mistake with laughs about their shoddy computer systems and luckily, no questions were asked.

Dog Daze by Kyle Steele

3:50 A.M, May 31st

Harman Williams leaned on his steering wheel and peered into the darkness. He and his pickup truck were heading to Hell. Too

tired to listen to the radio, he drove in silence keeping himself awake by slurping down gas-station coffee. A splotch of dark spots stained the base of the gearshift where he'd spilled and dripped coffee a thou-

sand times before. His wife bitched about the stains, but he didn't care. It was his damn truck and she could kiss his ass, because he worked hard for it and if he wanted a truck then he could by damn well have it.

"By damn well have it?" He wasn't making much sense. He hated this end-of-the-month inventory crap. Same thing every month—him and ten other fuckers in the plant counting shit. Yes, shit. That's all it was. Someone else's shit nonetheless. Ten of this, ten of that. And all of it for The Man.

The darkness closed in on Harman until he was driving through a tunnel. No other cars on the road, just him as he curved through the night toward the plant and a job in Hell. And that's what it was alright. A job in Hell. How had he got himself into this crap in the first place? He hated working in the cavernous building with the pounding of the machines and the constant chemical odor wafting through the air. Sometimes, the fumes even invaded his spacious, well-lit office.

A Cartoon (?) by OneNeck



He knew how. His eyes narrowed. Looking out the window but not really seeing where he was going. The money. His truck. Her Lexus. The private school. The Gap. Ann Taylor. The Italian leather sofa. All of this brought to his family, courtesy of The Man and his shit that Harman had to count!

Harman steered without thinking as he zoomed through a curve. He held the truck steady knowing that at any moment an eighteen-wheeler could come sliding around to meet him. Suddenly, in the road--not in the middle, but to right side of his lane was a huge hulk of matted black fur. A dog? He swerved. The thing looked up at him in an instant, there was a long snout and huge, pale-blue, almost-white eyes. He missed it, went back into his lane and then, like that, he was riding along again in the silence.

It was like nothing had happened, except for his racing heart and the line of coffee that was inching its way down his dashboard. What the hell was that? A dog? A bear? One of those wolfhounds? Bearhounds? No, it was a dog, trotting along toward him like it owned the road. And those eyes. Why did he remember them when he was driving so fast?

He took a sip of coffee and paused and then it hit him. Those eyes knew. In that one split second those eyes knew that he hated his job and hated his life and he was sure they knew other things, too, but he didn't know what these things were.

Harman placed his coffee in the cup holder and reached over into the glove box and pulled out a pack of Camels. The red glow of the tip and the refreshing first lung-full of smoke helped erase the memory of the dog and soon he

was pulling into the parking lot of Helium Energy & Liquid Laminators.

3:50 A.M., June 30th

Harman was once again speeding through the darkness as he headed toward Hell and yet another month-end inventory. This time he'd lit up his first cigarette before pulling out of the driveway. He stopped before backing into the road and stared up at his home...Heaven? Was it all worth it? In a country where the median income was forty-thousand, he was making two times that, but he had to do it in Hell.

Smoke filled his cab as he pushed down on the accelerator. Pine trees and oaks lined the road to Hell. In some places the oaks almost touched as they stretched their spindly limbs across the road. It was in these spots where thoughts of Hell loomed over him



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like a dark cloud of despair and bad visions came to mind: The screaming, the yelling and the constant pounding of the machines intertwined with flashes of the workers' faces as sweat striped their brows.

Harman swiped a hand across his forehead. Damn, it was already hot. The sweat beads oozed out along his neck as he waited on his truck's air conditioner to kick in. He'd hoped the weather would break soon, but you never could tell. It could go on like this until late September. Well, that's what it was...dog days. Yep, it was the dog days of summer now.

Then it hit him. Dog days. He'd completely forgotten about the dog. He was in the same curve and almost at the same spot, but it was so dark. He started to search for the animal and BOOM, like that it was there. A black mass of fur with huge, pale-blue eyes staring at him. He swerved without thinking and after righting his truck in the center of the lane he glanced into his rearview mirror, but it was too dark to see any sign of the canine.

This time, something else stuck in his mind. It wasn't the eyes, it was the mouth. The huge snout had been parted by a row of long, white teeth and here was the weird thing. The edges of the mouth were turned up—in a grin. That damned dog was laughing at him. He had the brief urge to whip his truck around in the road and run that dog down like it was a...well, like it was a dog. But then he'd be late for the inventory. And with that, his thoughts focused on Hell and the dog drifted to the back of his mind.

3:45 A.M., August 31st

Harman slurped his coffee and sucked on a Camel as he steered through the curve. The July inven-

tory had been Hell. None of the numbers they counted matched up with what they were supposed to have. The boss had tried to blame him, but Harman pointed out that he'd been reporting the problems to Accounting for months now. Everyone denied everything and in the end it was Harman who sat in the chair at the long, polished table in the plant manager's office. McGavin, the man across from him, was young with slicked-back hair and he had been sent down from corporate to "straighten things out."

He ordered Harman to fix the problem no matter what it took. "We won't have this same issue when we finish up in September." Then he stood up, straightened his tie and leaned over the table so his pale-blue eyes were only a few inches from Harman's. "Will we?"

As Harman left the office he tried to put his finger on what it was about the man's eyes that stuck in his mind. He wasn't quite sure, but it kept ticking in his head like a bomb.

He was already through the curve when he realized he hadn't seen the dog. It had been there in July. In fact, the damn thing had almost killed him. He'd met the dog on the curve as usual only this time when he swerved, he almost ended up plastered on the front of an eighteen wheeler. When he looked up in his rearview mirror, he could see the outline of the dog wagging its tail in the rear lights of the truck.

But not this time. He made it all the way through the curve and no dog. Harman eased up on the accelerator and then he saw it. In the middle of the road was the black mass. He slowed further, came to a stop and opened his door to get a better look. The dim interior light lent the dog a pale, yellow

cast and Harman saw its chest rise and fall slowly as a red line oozed out of its mouth and into a growing puddle. The dog's eyes, which focused on Harman, had changed from the pale-blue to almost black and while he was repulsed at the sight, the sudden urge to touch the dog surged through Harman's mind as sweat dripped down his back. As if an unseen force was tugging at his hand, he leaned out of his truck and reached down to stroke the dog.

He almost expected the dog to lash out at him when his hand contacted the brittle fur, but instead it remained still and kept its eyes riveted on Harman. A bolt of cold surged through his body and Harman jerked his hand away. The dog was cold--very cold. He scooted back into the seat, closed the door and stared down at the dog as he flexed his fingers to work some warmth back into them. A gasp escaped Harman's mouth as he watched the dog take its last breath. His companion of the night was now dead in the middle of the road.

Harman looked away as he placed his truck in gear then turned for one last look. The grin was gone and the eyes had been replaced with dark holes that revealed nothingness.

McGavin was the first and only person to walk into Harman's office and inquire as to why he wasn't doing the inventory. He smiled and tried to be polite because that's the way he was when he was ordering someone to do something they didn't want to do. But all Harman saw was a huge mocking grin and pale-blue eyes. The eyes that knew his pain and the grin that mocked him.

Harman fumbled in his file cabinet as McGavin droned on about inventory accuracy and stock

dividends. He stopped speaking when Harman turned around with the short, gray piece of pipe in his hand. Before the boss knew what was going on, Harman had leaned across the table and grabbed him by the throat. McGavin's eyes narrowed and grin widened.

Mock me, will ya? thought Harman. Then he raised the pipe.

It wasn't long before the parking lot was filled with sirens, television news crews and law-enforcement officials. Stunned employees staggered around making comments about how they couldn't believe what had happened and how it was such a tragedy, even though many of them were more than happy to see The Man finally take a hit back.

Later in the morning a helicopter landed in the parking lot. From it stepped McGavin's replacement-Smith--a young, hard charger, sent down from corporate. It was best for morale to get everyone back on the job and that's just what he did. He also ordered a cleaning crew into the office where specks of blood, pieces of pink and gray matter and flecks of white seemed to coat everything. The pipe, with tufts of hair still stuck to it, had already been secured by the police as evidence.

Smith had one more duty before he could relax in his new office. He approached the gurney just before they placed it into the ambulance. A white-jumpsuit wearing EMT pulled back the sheet and McGavin's dark sockets stared back up revealing nothing but emptiness. Likewise, the grin that had once split his face was now a bloody hole. Smith nodded to the policeman and then a few words were exchanged. Assurances were given that Harman Williams would be found.

Smith stepped into his office and slid down in his leather chair, leaned back and closed his eyes. Even in his office he could hear the soft hum of the machines that were pounding the life out of some poor souls and his eyes opened wide with knowledge and then a mocking grin of gleaming, white teeth crossed his face.

Harman Williams watched from the woods. He hunched in the shadows, his long tongue dangled from his mouth as he panted. The first man to see him was a cop sent out into the woods to make sure everything was safe. "Howya doin, boy?" the cop said. He reached down to pet the matted, black fur on Harman's back, but when he saw Harman's eyes he pulled his hand back and stared. Harman grinned and then ambled off into the woods—it wouldn't be long till the month was up and

time for another inventory.

After the dog was gone, the cop stood there scratching his head and wondering what it was about the dog that bothered him. He was thinking about the animal's face when the voice of one of the EMT's interrupted him.

"Hot out here, ain't it?"

The cop nodded and mumbled, "Dog days of summer is what it is."

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Thunder Road by Kerri French

Another day or so, almost falling off the hinges-
and us along with it, the way we are with each other:

overheated and angry. I stayed out at the lake yesterday
so long my skin went numb, how it does sometimes

when I'm with you in the backseat. Maybe my father's
right: maybe it's too late in the morning to be calling,

but there goes the phone ringing anyways, honey.
I know, the day's too strange to focus-the sun stays out

even when we can't see it. It's too much for one season,
but I'm trying to speak through the sweat. Even the water

stays warm this time of year. But, there's still the night,
somehow ours for the taking. Inside the gas station, it's

just you and me, pulling ourselves through the aisles
of candy and beer, soft jazz on the radio. These two hours

could stretch into two years if we just let it. Sometimes
nothing's the best we can do. Take you, for example.

All those other boys are thirty seconds from dying, talking
love comma love, anything at all to avoid the drought

of thick afternoons. They'll scrape your name in wet cement,
whatever it takes, even ignore the back alleys of other girls,

their red bras calling. Look closer and you'll see the decibels
written across their chests. Listen harder and you'll hear

everything I won't say. Baby, it all comes down to this.

Thé Chez Péle by McKenzee

I have spent my life in airports,
train stations, waiting rooms.
I have traveled with a subtle sense of doom.
I have stood, staring into the volcano,
afraid to shift a stone.

So leave me to babble on, alone.
Eloquently dressed,
my thoughts creased and pressed,
on the fringes of your memory
as the ashes sift and play.

It was teatime in the house of Pele.
The butter oozed across the scones,
and the steam was hissing from the sea.
The evidence is strewn for all to see
across the tablecloth.

Did you feel the gentle rumble?
Hear the rattle of the teacups?
See them spill on the ancient lace,
spreading stains, like storm clouds?
Did they shape a face?

This is what happens to Love you misplace,
Those friends you are allowed to hate.
Their words, like pebbles cast,
ripple through your fate.
and Pele smiles.

Billy Fallon (the Future of Advertising) by Denver Hill

LARYNGITAL LOVE STORIES by Margot Considine

i'm screaming in the middle of the library how
i want my voice back now! but
no one even looks up from their books,
& i'm stitching ripped-up bits of recycled term
papers
into the lining of my coat for insulation come winter -
i don't believe in summer anymore, only
this taunting regression, like the way
you send letters from half a block away
& then pretend not to recognize me
when i catch you unawares
with yr hand on my knee. i want
to run faster than cheetah wheels with you.
& i want to kill my liver quicker so
give me one more swig of that cherry nyquil, please.

Kerri French writes: "These poems are from a series based on Bruce Springsteen song titles, written from the perspective of the speaker in each song. A native of Greensboro, NC, I currently live in Boston and am a professor in the English Dept. at Mount Ida College."

Larry "McKenzee" Holderfield might be better known to our readers for his comic "Sinister Bedfellows," which appears with some intermittent frequency in these pages.

Denver Hill lives in Raleigh NC. He works at the Colony Theatre.

Kyle Steele ("Dog Daze") has been a door-to-door window salesman, Army Officer, production supervisor and buyer. He lives in Raleigh with my wife, daughter, son and two dogs.

B. Seckinger Ash ("Hurricane Priaptalyne") is a student and teacher in Athens, Georgia. This story is part of a larger work which is currently taking shape.

OneNeck is our token affirmative-action Scot, from Edinburgh.

Margot Considine didn't offer a bio. No prob.

In summation: "What is the future of advertising? Dreams. By using surreal images in our commercials we will encourage the consumer to dream about our products."

Amidst congratulation, suit worthy of Hitler, mustache, clears throat to garner attention. "Fine Fallon," altering the felicitous mood. "Good but I would like to add something." Taking his time, making them hang on his word like a sneaky politician. Mink eyes. Vulturine glow. "It needs biblical imagery."

Agreeing nods.

Off the top of his bald head: "Jesus...covered head to toe with cuts and bruises, being pulled to heaven with strings through his hands and feet... He pauses, looks at camera (breaking fourth wall), and says 'Are you stoned enough?'" A heartbeat. "It's an ad for our landscaping division."

Others digest the image. "Ahhh..." they belch upon realizing. Awareness spreading like cancer.

"What about Mohammed?"

"Yes!"

"Buddha?"

"Yes, yes, that's where the money is!"

Rosy senior, face flushed like a virus. "This is unethical," he gasps.

Room titters. Old man is out.

"Brainstorm later." Billy is ready to leave.

"Let's finish the paperwork." Internal sigh. Hope for a quick death.

At the end of the meeting the suits are chanting new slogans. They are eating out of Billy's strong hands. Offers of women, drugs, and money, everything under the sky. Billy shrugs. He wants the sky.

... wants a bath. It's just a job, a mask, a living. Method acting. One of the greats. The best actors aren't famous. They blend. They can disappear. I am good. My family doesn't have to know... A plan? Poison the reservoir? Suicide bomb?

No. Wrong. The puppetmaster. Not the President, the one who tells the President what to do.

... Billy unbalanced ... be strong. It's just a job. I'm a good person. I am good. Repeat repeat repeat...

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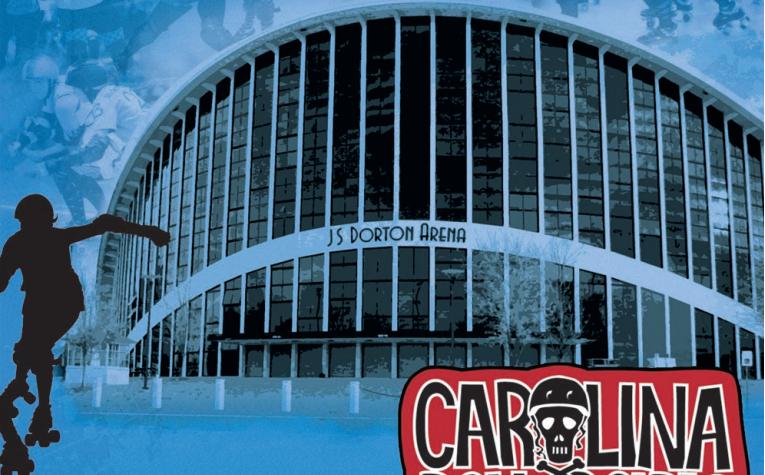
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