



*Sunny days chasin' the clouds away with James Maxey,  
Judy Woodall, a new Five Minutes With,  
and The Dream Journal.*

# The Blotter

April 2009

MAGAZINE

THE SOUTH'S UNIQUE, FREE, INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE AND ARTS MAGAZINE

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Cover and editorial art by Judy  
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## “April is in my mysterious face”

We occasionally play this game called “Mancala”. Like so many things, it seems simple at first blush, but has a confusing ending. A lot like love, or driving to our friends’ house in Charlotte. The girls and I have read the rules carefully – set up the stones in the cups, move one cup’s stones around the board – your scoring cup is here, mine is there. Most scored stones wins. All good – simple enough to be played on a desert afternoon on the plains of Tsavo. But here is the trick. If you go out, your opponent gets all the stones left on the board. OK, I guess: don’t go out too early. But, if you save up your stones, your opponent can take those stones away from you. And if you save up your stones in one cup, you leave more stones in your opponent’s cups when you move that cup’s stones.

See? Not so simple. Obviously the work of a shaman, sitting by the river looking at the social workings of crocodiles and hippos. Sure, the Croc has teeth, but the hippo isn’t made muzzy by the cold water. Hippo appears to be a vegetarian, but will eat meat when the mood strikes. Croc likes to store its food, but when there’s food in abundance, will dine on the fly. And so on. Just because there isn’t a place to plug the game in, and a team of programmers designing the graphics, doesn’t mean the game is “stupid.”

What makes it fun is to watch my girls play each other. Liv is the chess player, the master of Parcheesi, and the Uno queen. Move fast, strike hard. Conquer. So Mancala bedevils her somewhat.

“How come I don’t get all the points left on the board?” she asks. I cannot explain. They’re not points, I offer. They’re stones. I cannot even suggest that they represent something. What do stones on the board represent?

I remind her that not everything has a scorecard. Winning is good in a lot of places. But not, for example, in Math. At least, not in fourth grade Math. In school, I tell her, it is much more important to learn than come in first. “Yes, yes,” she says impatiently. “So is this the right answer?” I check and nod. It is almost always the right answer, and she wants credit for each one. Still, she is frustrated because she doesn’t immediately understand algebra. And because her sensei doesn’t give out colored belts. Because we don’t play Monopoly more. Grade me, she cries out.

Bea, on the other hand, has a different perspective. A view brought on, perhaps, because of being the second child. Ranking is irrelevant to her. She likes hand-me-downs, doesn’t stress out over competitive games. Bea does more role-playing, with little plastic knights and fair madens, with Barbie, and with Gettysburg the cat. Reads to be in the story, not to finish the book, yet does the math to get it done, not to get the star on her paper. At the supper table, she doesn’t tell us what happened during school today, although she hums loud

little tunes while Liv describes her day until all lines of communication are broken and we have to remind both of them that it isn't polite to interrupt, or scream, or hit. And Bea likes Mancala immensely. The game, she says, is about moving the stones. And to see and know how beautiful the stones are. How the stones enjoy being in the same cup together, like long lost friends, like a reunion of family. She is, of course, a nut. On the other hand, she has broken the code, become a happy person without goals, without competition or stress. Not sure what to make of all this just yet, because Bea is also the consummate pokey child. Slow to dress, to eat her Cheerios, to walk to class. Maybe lack of competitive drive is a manifestation of not wanting to hurry. Or, maybe not. And while Liv has a list as long as your arm of things she wants to do when she grows up, Bea doesn't want to grow up. So says she, anyhow. As a parent there are a million and one reasons to let something like that spook you. But who knows? She'll probably be a doctor, sans borders. Or a dancer. Or study chimpanzees in n'Goro-goro. Or be a Mancala champion. Personally, I think we can learn from her. Or maybe I'm just getting old, and no longer care who wins the Super Bowl, so long as it's a good game, and we don't run out of salsa.

Garry - [chief@blotterrag.com](mailto:chief@blotterrag.com)



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*CAUTION*

*Hold onto your hats, folks.  
It's going to be a bumpy  
night.*

## "Echo of the Eye"

by James Maxey

*Kidd pumped quarter after quarter into the washer at the Laundromat. The humid air was thick with the smell of bleach and Tide. The water in the window of the machine churned pink. A career as a butcher had left Kidd unusually skilled at removing blood stains.*

It was after midnight when Jason pulled the RV into Hog Station, NC. This wasn't Jason's first trip to this tiny speck on the map. He first visited two years ago when his father dumped Cassie at Stanley University, the ultra-conservative, unaccredited college that was the town's second claim to fame. As her father had pushed her out of the car into the arms of a pair of burley advisors she'd screamed, "Jason! Don't let him do this!"

He'd said nothing as she'd been dragged away. At the time, he thought it was for the best. Cassie had been ... adrift, morally, since their mother died.

Jason returned to pick her up a year later, when their father passed. She'd ridden home with her eyes firmly fixed out the window and her lips tightly sealed. After the funeral she'd announced she wanted to go back to Hog Station. When he asked her why, she answered, "I'm hungry for barbecue."

At the time, he assumed Cassie had outgrown her vegetarian phase. When Jason dropped her off in front of her dorm, she'd said, "I'm happy he's dead." But she didn't look happy. Her expression was completely vacant.

When he drove off, he didn't know it would be the last time he'd see her.

Hog Station hadn't changed since his last visit. Main Street was a row of brick shops facing a rusted railroad track. Most of the buildings were boarded up, with only a barber, a lawyer, and a butcher still in business. Yet almost all the parking spaces were filled, not something Jason had expected to see at midnight. The roof of the butcher shop flickered with reddish light, as if on fire. Jason pulled the RV to the curb and opened his door. Smoke washed into his vehicle—savory, mouth-watering smoke. The sound of laughter rolled down from above.

Jason walked to the butcher shop door. Kidd's Meats, established 1879. This was Hogg Station's first claim to fame. Word of mouth about the quality of the meat pulled in customers from far and wide. The shop was frequently mentioned on Food Network. Still, Jason hadn't expected to find the place open at midnight, and especially not on the 4th of July. The lights were on but the door was locked. From the roof, someone yelled, "Around back!"

Jason followed the narrow brick alley to the rear. A police cruiser sat parked next to a dumpster. An iron ladder ran up the two-story building. At the top of the ladder, tiki torches flickered.

"Come on up," someone yelled, though he couldn't see who. He

carefully climbed the rusty ladder.

A crowd was jammed onto the roof, filling four large picnic tables. One table held the ghoulish sight of an entire roasted pig, the flesh of its face half picked away to reveal menacing tusks and vacant eye-sockets.

"Oh my God," a fat man in a Hawaiian shirt brayed as he dug into the pig's eye-socket with a fork. "This meat back here—Christ almighty!"

A second fat man at the table knocked back a bottle of Cuervo. Jason recognized him even out of uniform—Doc Law, the local sheriff.

Law wiped his mouth on his forearm and said, loudly, "My friends, in my youth, I traveled Europe. I visited the Sistine Chapel. When I gazed up and beheld that glorious work of Michelangelo, I understood, for the first time in my life, why God had given me eyes. And tonight, dear friends, feasting upon this fine swine's cheek, I glimpse God's purpose in giving me a tongue."

Law's speech was met with a simple, "Aw, shucks."

This was spoken by a man in pirate garb, with a capuchin monkey perched on his shoulder. The sight of the pig had been such a draw to Jason's eye that he'd missed both pirate and monkey, partially concealed behind a veil of smoke rising from a large coal-filled drum. Sausages sizzled on a grate above the coals. Next to the drum was a pole that held a realistic human rib cage that bore the hand-painted sign "Dead Man's Chest."

The crowd resumed its conversation as Doc Law went back to devouring pork face. Jason walked to the pirate, who offered a friendly, "Ahoy, matey! Aaahrrr!"

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"Are you William Kidd?" Jason asked.

"Aye," Kidd answered in pirate drawl, "Who be ye?"

"Jason Rogers." Jason watched Kidd's face to see if there was any reaction to the name. Perhaps his sister had mentioned him. Kidd showed only a pirate grin.

"Want a bratwurst, matey?" Kidd asked. "Or would ye rather grab a fork and pull up to the pig?"

"This is the first time I've seen a whole roasted pig outside of the movies," Jason said.

Kidd dropped the pirate accent, and said in a more southern drawl, "I use all the pig but the oink. When you kill a creature, there's a duty not to be wasteful."

"I guess," Jason said.

"If there's any left, you should get some of the meat in the eye-socket. Good eats."

"I'll take your word for it," Jason said. "And the sheriff's. He's got quite the silver tongue."

"When he's drinking, the former professor comes out."

"He used to be a professor?"

"Taught literature here at Stanley. Got fired after being accused of trading grades for sex. Instead of leaving town in shame, he used his gift for gab to run for sheriff."

"Huh," said Jason. "I met him last year and took him for a redneck with a word-a-day calendar. Guess I shouldn't judge people by first impressions."

"Why not? Saves time."

"True," said Jason. "Now that I've met you, I don't think this trip has been in vain."

"Oh?"

"I'm dying, Mr. Kidd," Jason said. He dug into his pocket and produced a business card for the butcher shop on which they stood. "You might be my last hope."

He handed Kidd the business card. Kidd looked down, at his own name and title: William Kidd, Meat Artist. Kidd flipped the card over, revealing a handwritten number.

"My cell phone, Mr. Kidd," said Jason. "Why don't you give me a call tomorrow?"

"Um," Kidd said. "If you're dying, what do you want me for? I'm

not a doctor. I'm a butcher."

"I know," said Jason.

*"I don't think anything waits after we die," Cassie said.*

*Cassie was always blurting out stuff like this. They had just had sex and she was still tied spread-eagle to the bed. Her proper line of dialogue, Kidd felt, should've been, "That was fantastic!" He would even have been satisfied with, "My arms have fallen asleep."*

*Kidd had been the one doing all the physical work and was exhausted. He decided not to play into her gratuitous weirdness. He grabbed the butcher knife next to the bed and lunged toward her, slashing the cotton rope that bound her right wrist.*

*Cassie raised her arm, stretching her fingers.*

*"That tingles. I love the sensation."*

*"You can finish the rest." Kidd placed the knife in her free hand and collapsed next to her, halfway to sleep.*

*"My father has probably putrefied," Cassie said. Her dad had died two months ago. Kidd had never met the man. The main thing he knew was that*

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her father had treated his manic-depressive daughter with prayer instead of Prozac. The result was the strange skinny girl lying next to him. Each time Cassie knocked on his door she sported fresh ink-pen tattoos on paper-white skin. She had skin you could see veins through, stretched over a torso where you could count every rib.

"Rotting seems wasteful," she said, dropping the ropes and knife onto the floor. She curled up next to him, not making any contact. "Indians left bodies out to be picked over by buzzards."

"Check Gertrude's food bowl on your way out," Kidd mumbled.

"When I die," Cassie said, "I'd like to donate my body to a restaurant. Get turned into a stew and have my friends over for a feast."

Kidd opened his eyes, feeling more alert.

"You don't have any friends," he said.

A pounding on his door woke Kidd mid-afternoon. He rolled out of bed, his head throbbing. Gertrude stretched beside him, dead to the world. She'd gotten into the pina coladas. Pineapple, coconut, rum—a monkey didn't stand a chance.

The pounding continued. Kidd staggered into the living room and yanked the door open.

Doc Law stood outside, fist raised to knock again. Mirrored sunglasses hid his eyes.

"Sup, Doc," said Kidd, his tongue thick and sticky.

"One of my deputies said he spied Jason Rogers in town. That name mean anything to you?"

Kidd nodded. "He was at the

party."

"He was? Why didn't I notice him?"

"You know him?"

Law nodded. "Maybe eight months ago, his sister disappeared. That Goth chick. He came down here and wouldn't leave me alone for a week. He thought she might have been murdered, or worse."

"Hmm," said Kidd. "Well, he's back."

"And at the party?"

"Not more than ten feet from you. Didn't stay long."

"Damn," said Law, shaking his head. "Father Time is taking his toll. In my youth, I could drink gallons of Cuervo and retain my acumen. Ten feet, you say?"

"Yeah. This have anything to do with me?"

"I didn't bother you about this at the time, but Rogers had this baseless theory you were involved with his sister's disappearance. He'd ventured down here to collect her belongings. Took residence at a hotel in Smithfield to search through her stuff. He found one of your business cards."

"Half the people in town have those. More than half."

"I know. There was also some poetry—though given my knowledge of the literary arts I am loathe to use that word. The writings were of a genre moody young women are inexplicably fond of, bad free verse of the 'his love consumes me' type. Morbid-romantic crap, and not a word naming you. It's all about some shadowy, unnamed 'He.' Many would-be poets fear actual nouns."

Kidd closed his eyes and

leaned against the doorframe. Law could meander for hours on poetry. Not believing for a moment it would work, Kidd tried to get Law back on track. "This involves me how?"

"Jason thought that you were 'He,'" Doc Law said. "I gave him my professional opinion. I didn't know Cassie but I'd seen her around. She obviously didn't belong at Stanley. I suspect she took the money from her inheritance and hit the road. Jason wasn't convinced. He found your card among Cassie's effects suspicious because his sister was a vegetarian."

"Big deal," said Kidd. "So am I."

Law rocked back on the heels of his alligator boots, as if he'd been struck. "Surely you jest?"

"Nope. Vegetarian since I was nineteen. Mostly."

"But . . ."

"Yeah, I know. Butcher, irony, yadda-yadda. Get back to this Robert's guy."

"Rogers. Deputy says he saw him downstairs at noon, trying the door to your shop."

"I'm supposed to be open. I didn't get to bed until 9 this morning."

"There's your mistake," said Law. "I haven't been to bed." Law paused to produce a hip flask, from which he took a swig. "Momentum serves a man as well as sleep."

"I'm going back to bed now."

"Return to your well-deserved slumber. If this fellow becomes a nuisance, you know where to find me."

"We should tell each other our darkest secrets," Cassie said, as Kidd tightened her blindfold.

"You'd confess anything," Kidd said, rubbing her cheek with his gloved hand.

"I lost my virginity when I was thirteen to my best friend Kiera. A week later she died in a wreck. I thought it was God's punishment."

"Okay," Kidd said. Then, deadpan: "That's so shocking. You're such a bad girl."

Cassie pouted. "I'm not trying to shock you. I just want . . . I want more intimacy. All we ever do is screw. We never talk."

"You talk all the time," Kidd said.

"I tell you everything," she said,

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"and you don't give anything back."

Kidd yanked her blindfold off and began untying her.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"I don't feel like playing," he said. "You're right . . . I just want the sex. If I want conversation I've got Gertrude."

It was ten at night when Kidd finally called Jason. Jason said to meet him in front of the butcher shop—he'd have the RV there in two minutes. He asked that Kidd come out to the RV—and, to Kidd's mind, he sounded a little nervous.

"Come on, Gertrude," Kidd said. Gertrude sat on the couch watching *Gilligan's Island*, but looked up alertly as her name was spoken. Kidd nodded and Gertrude sprang from the couch, flying to his shoulder. She landed light as a bag of cement—Gertrude had filled out considerably under his care.

Kidd went down the narrow stairs that led from his apartment into the butcher shop. At the front window headlights were pulling up.

Kidd left the shop, not bothering to lock it, and walked up to the motor home. It was a nice model, very sleek, something you might expect a rich granddad to be driving around Florida.

The door opened.

"Come in," Jason said.

Kidd admired the layout. The RV was all kitchen, a nice one, with a chunky antique butchers block square in the center. This reminded Kidd of his grandfather's butchers block—his father had sold it years ago. His father hadn't had a sentimental bone in him, but Kidd was instantly transported to childhood, watching his grandfather work the meat. He'd never once doubted what he wanted to do with his life.

"Nice table," Kidd said, running his hand along the oiled surface. The wood was scarred with knife marks. It even had cigarette burns along the edge, just like his grandfather's.

"You bring that monkey everywhere?" Jason asked.

"I feel kind of naked without her."

"You let her in the shop?"

"She has a cage. I don't let her roam free. She steals meat and gets

aggressive." As Kidd said this, he noted how clean the kitchen was. Jason must be a germ-freak.

"Gertrude is housetrained," he said.

"Oh," said Jason, in a tone that indicated the question hadn't been on his mind.

Jason looked down at the butcher's block, gathering his thoughts. He took a deep breath. "Did I tell you last night that I'm . . ." His voice trailed off.

"Dying," said Kidd. "What of?"

"Ennui," said Jason. He grinned. "That's my little joke. Brain tumor. I have six months."

"Or longer," Kidd said. "People beat these things."

"I'm not doing chemo," said Jason. "Or any treatment."

"Oh," said Kidd.

"It's counterproductive to pollute my body."

"Counterproductive?"

"Have you thought much about dying, Mr. Kidd?" Jason asked. "More specifically, have you thought about what will happen to your body after death?"

"Not really," said Kidd.

"I have. You might say it's become an obsession of mine. Last year, I visited the Body Works exhibit, in Berlin. You've heard of it?"

Kidd gave a non-committal shrug.

"There's an artist who takes human cadavers and plasticizes them. Turns them into works of art. Not long after my visit, I learned I had a brain tumor. It made me think. I'm young. I don't have kids; I have no real legacy to leave the world."

"Did you contact Body Works? See if they can use you?"

"Here's the catch," said Jason. "Due to the nature of my tumor, they won't accept my donation. They're overbooked with donors anyway, but, even if they weren't, the fact I have something wrong with my brain means they can't accept my donation."

"So donate your body to a medical school," said Kidd. "The tumor's a plus."

"I've considered it," said Jason. "It isn't quite the same. It lacks . . . artistry. The bodies in Berlin—they've transcended the status of corpse. They're art."

"You've given this some thought," said Kidd. "I think I see where you're going with this."

"You're the best butcher in North America," said Jason.

"Aw," said Kidd. "Shucks."

*Cassie rubbed her wrists, which felt naked without the ropes. Kidd wouldn't make eye contact.*

*"You do have a secret, don't you?" she said. "Something awful. You're afraid of it."*

*Kidd turned away, leaving the bedroom. Cassie paused for a minute, afraid to follow. She dressed slowly before walking into the kitchen. He was standing in front of the coffee maker, nude save for the leather gloves. His nakedness while she was dressed gave her a feeling of power.*

*"It's only an act," she said. "The dominance. The confidence and control. You aren't even in control of your emotions."*

Jason left town empty handed—Kidd had treated the whole thing as a joke. Still, Jason had seen the gleam in Kidd's eye. Kidd may not have agreed with his words, but his eyes told Jason that Kidd was already planning the menu.

Jason kept a notebook where he recorded all the evidence. It was full of pages of his sister's poetry. It had a Polaroid taken sometime around their father's death. He knew this because Cassie was constantly updating her pen tattoos, and the artwork in the picture was what she'd displayed in the sleeveless black gown she'd worn to the funeral. In the photo, she was blindfolded, tied to a bed, and covered with red bite marks. The photo was frustratingly

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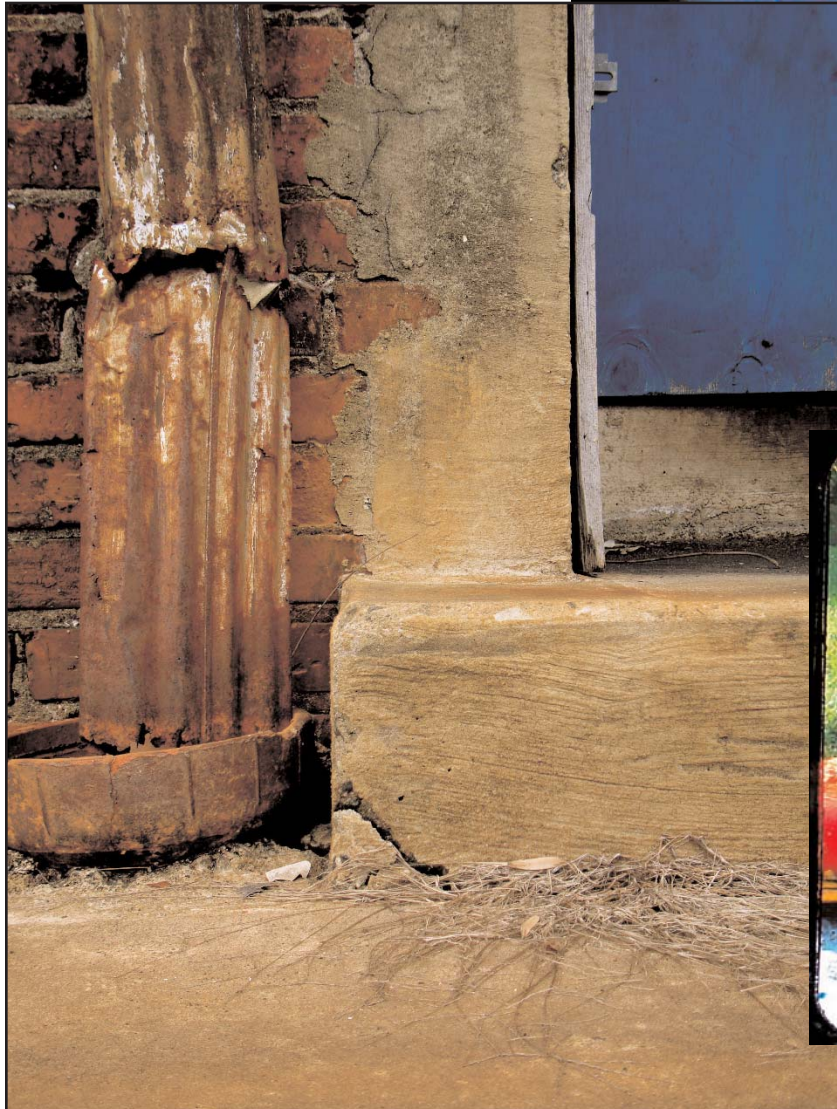
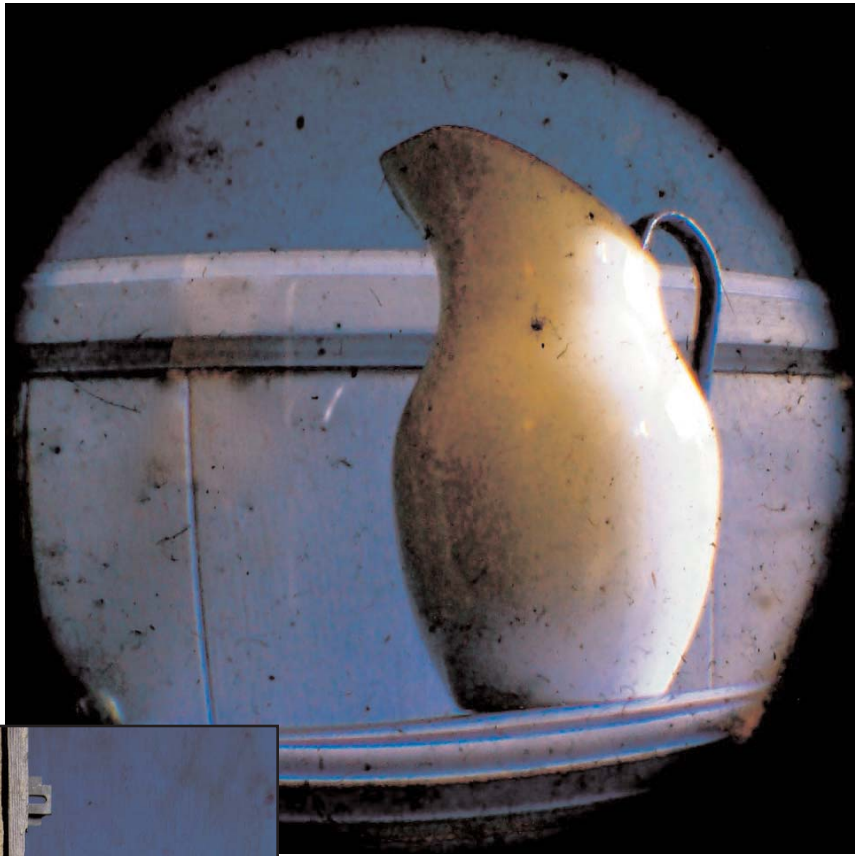
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Ed. Note: I wanted to have each of these images as the cover for this month's issue, make them collectable & tradeable. Ah, well. About Judy: she's patient and kind and doesn't have a cell phone, is a self-taught photographer, and a hospice nurse. And for all of you who, like me, believe that this is the perfect combination...it says on her website that she's taken. Once again, in unison: ah, well.



Judy Woodall -  
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Cover: Henface

Editorial page:  
Recording Hooverville

Left: Pitcher 2

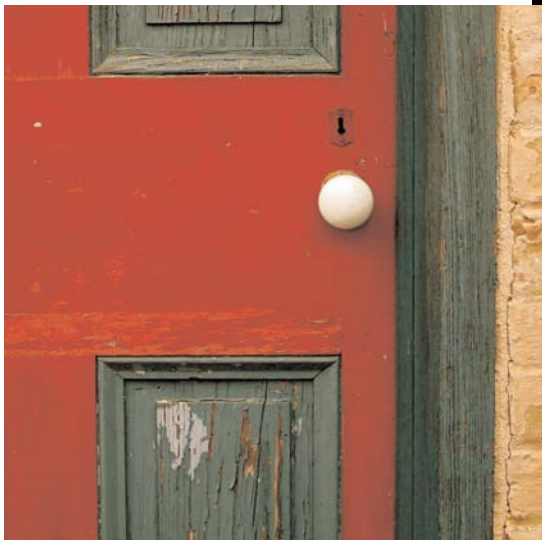
Far Left: Blue Doorway  
with a Crack

Lower Left: Oh, Lord, it  
was his boots

Right: O O Oak Barrel

Below: Doorway Green  
and Red

Lower Right: HeartLock



## The Blotter

barren of further clues—the only background was the white sheet.

On the page opposite was a poem entitled “Devoured.” It praised her “Master of Meat.” Jason wasn’t sure how much more the sheriff needed spelled out for him.

The RV was wired with spy cams and tape recorders. He knew in his gut that Kidd had killed his sister. All that was left was to get Kidd to confess. Or, failing that, to get Kidd to agree on tape to kill him. Get irrefutable proof Kidd was capable of the crime.

The rest of July, and through the hot, endless August, Jason haunted a trailer park an hour away from Hog Station, closer to the ocean. He spent his days wandering the small towns near the Carolina coast, quaint tourist destinations like New Bern and Elizabeth City. He sent Kidd postcards, not mentioning what they’d discussed, but making sure Kidd wouldn’t forget him.

As September rolled around, he gave Kidd a call.

“Change your mind yet?” he asked.

“I admire your persistence,” said Kidd.

“Is that a yes?”

“No. Labor Day’s this weekend. I’m up to my neck in special orders. Call me when I’m not so busy.”

Jason hung up the phone, satisfied. There was only one reason Kidd would ask that he call back.

*Kidd turned around, holding two cups of coffee. He offered Cassie one, she took it.*

*“I control the world,” Kidd said.*

*“Tell me one thing,” she said.*

*“Tell me something you’ve never told anyone else.”*

*“I told you I left home when I was 17 and hitchhiked around the world.”*

*“That’s not a secret,” she said. “That’s bragging. But you can’t be perfect. There must be something you keep hidden, some dark secret.”*

*“We’re in a B&D relationship I won’t let you talk about. You are my dark secret.”*

*Cassie sipped her coffee. His dark secret. The words gave her a buzzy, electric feeling in the small of her back. These were the most romantic words she’d ever imagined.*

*“If that doesn’t satisfy you, how’s this? When I was nineteen, I ate a man.”*

*Cassie rolled her eyes. He had broken the mood. “A gay encounter? This is your embarrassing secret?”*

*“No,” Kidd said. “I devoured him.”*

*“You devour me,” she said, raising her hand to touch her purple hickey.*

*“I mean I cooked him, chewed him, swallowed him, digested him. He was delicious.”*

A week before Halloween, Kidd met Jason on Highway 70, thirty miles from Hog Station, where people were less likely to recognize him. It was a chill day. The sky hung gray and low.

They drove out to Atlantic Beach. They didn’t talk much. When Jason tried to go over the plan one last time, Kidd said, “I know the plan,” ending the conversation. Even Gertrude was quiet.

Jason was frustrated. Kidd always did this—he would never say the words Jason needed him to say: “The plan is, we fake your death, I bring

*you back to the RV and kill you with your homemade electric chair, then I butcher you and sell the meat in my shop.”*

Of course, the homemade electric chair was a fake. Once he had Kidd on camera pulling the switch, he would pull out the gun hidden under the seat and make a citizen’s arrest. He was tempted to cut to the chase and use the gun to force Kidd to confess to Cassie’s murder, or even at least to knowing her, but he suspected that might not stand up in court.

Night had fallen by the time they reached Fort Macon, at the end of the island. The parking lot was empty. Together they drug out the inflatable boat. They waited in the mist as the electric pump filled the rubberized canvas with air. Gertrude pressed against the windshield, watching them work. When the boat was fully inflated, they carried it down to the sand.

It was high tide. Waves churned in the inlet, as the water of the sound rushed into the Atlantic. A boat launched now would be carried out to sea.

Jason dropped his suicide note into the boat.

“It says I only have weeks left, that I don’t want to still be alive when my mind goes.”

Jason bent over the boat and produced a box cutter. Silently, teeth clenched, he ran the blade across his open palm. A line of blood bubbled up. He touched the canvas, leaving a bloody handprint. He shook his hand, sending blood drops all around the boat.

“No one will ever know the truth,” he said.

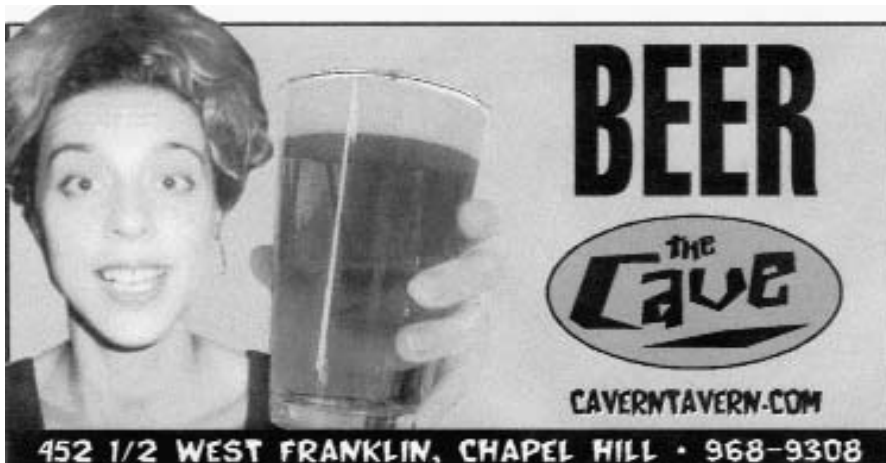
Jason waded into the waves. He stood there, in water up to his waist, as the current carried the boat away.

Jason turned and waded back to the beach. He said, “So far, things have gone pretty well.”

Kidd didn’t answer. It was dark save for the headlights. As Jason trod back onto the shore, Kidd was little more than a silhouette.

Jason walked to him, looking at his hand. “This really stings.”

He looked up. Kidd loomed over him, his left arm raised. He held a cleaver from his shop, big and heavy, its sharp edge gleaming. With a grunt that made Jason cringe, Kidd swung.



"His name was Big Mike. He was an Eastern Islander, making a living as a bush pilot in Alaska. I bummed a ride with him, trying to get to Kaktovic, a little village as far North as you can get. I got a little nervous when Mike lit up a joint ten minutes into the flight, but figured he was a pro. Except he wasn't. He crashed the plane into a valley. We were lucky to survive. The first couple of days, we kept thinking rescue might arrive any minute. After a week, we knew no one was looking for us. He'd been kind of lax filing flight plans. We'd made a little shelter out of the plane fuselage—and there were trees around, so we had a fire, and melted snow for water. But, we were hungry. Big Mike kept making these crazy jokes. He weighed, like, 300 pounds, I weighed maybe 130. I was going to go before he did. He said that when I went, he'd eat me. Said among his people, they called the white man long pig."

"So I killed him. Then I ate him. I confessed to the park ranger who found me a month later. He said he saw no reason either of us should ever mention it."

Cassie shook her head. "If you can't be serious, I'm wasting my time."

Kidd shrugged. "If talking doesn't work for you, we could always go back to bed and tie you up."

Cassie sighed. "Okay."

It was Halloween morning when Kidd got the mail. It was post-marked from a week before. Inside was a letter and a videotape.

"Kidd," the letter began:

"If you are reading this, something went wrong with my plan. Perhaps I'm dead. You haven't won. I know what you did to my sister. You'll rot in Hell for what you've done.

"More immediately, you'll rot in prison. I never had a brain tumor. I've been playing you like a violin, Mr. Kidd. I've videotaped every visit. I've recorded every phone call. You've been slick and evasive, but I still have an impressive body of evidence. All that evidence is now in the hands of the sheriff and the FBI, who've received identical packages. With luck, I'm still alive, and have delivered even more evidence to them. If I've not been lucky, and somehow you've killed me, I take comfort in knowing that my sacrifice will lead to bringing you to justice.

"Checkmate, Mr. Kidd."

Kidd sat the letter down on the table, went back into the kitchen, and resumed work on the slab of meat resting on the antique butchers block. He had a ton of work to do in preparation for tonight's festivities. Kidd chuckled as the full impact of Jason's scheme sunk in. What a melodramatic little prick.

"You're pretty skinny," Kidd said, studying Cassie's naked body. "Some okay meat on your legs, but, really, you're mostly bone. I guess I could fry up the skin. Make cracklins. Use the rest of you for sausage."

"You wouldn't use me for barbecue?" she asked, pouting.

He stroked the skin below her tiny breasts, feeling the ribs. "Not enough fat," he said. "You'd be too dry."

"I feel so wet," she said, arching her back as he knelt over her. "Promise me you'll eat me when I die."

"I'm going to eat you right now," he said, rubbing the edge of the knife along her cheek without cutting her.

Her breath caught in her throat, and she shuddered with pleasure.

Doc Law eased his cruiser down Main Street, enjoying the spectacle. Stanley College frowned upon Halloween festivities. This led the students to put extra care and effort into their masks. For one night a year, Hog Station reminded Law of Brazil's Carnival.

Law pulled his cruiser next to the dumpster behind Kidd's Meats. A half-dozen girls gathered here, smoking Lucky Strikes at the base of the ladder. They sported elaborate masks decorated with fur and feathers, and nothing

else save body paint. Earlier in the night, he could tell, the women had been jungle cats—the orange and tan paints that covered them had been decorated with broad black stripes and spots. Now, the paint that covered their breasts and buttocks was smudged into a muddy gray. Law tipped his hat to them as he passed.

"Ladies," he said.

On the rooftop, Doc Law found a jungle. The tiki torches along the roof's edge lit dozens of potted banana plants, their broad green leaves casting strange shadows.

At the rear of the roof sat a bamboo shack. A crude sign on a board read, "Cannibal Kidd's Manburgers." Kidd stood next to an enormous iron pot, big enough to hold at least two missionaries, perhaps three. The stew within bubbled over a propane burner, giving the night a meaty, peppery odor. Kidd wore with a palm frond skirt and a bone through his nose. Gertrude hung from the roof of the shack, greedily eyeing the stew.

"This might be the least politically correct display I've ever seen," Law said, approaching Kidd.

"I'd offer you a manburger," said Kidd, "but the tigresses cleaned me out. Business has been brisk. I'm down to stew, mostly."

"That's fine," said Law. "Smells good."

"I know," said Kidd. "Still, I might have something better suited to a man of your refined tastes."

"Do tell."

"Last July, when you were eating the pig's head—did you get any of the eye? Or did the mayor finish it off?"

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## The Blotter

"The mayor devoured it quicker than I could react," said Law. "He has the table manners of a wood chipper."

"Step back here," said Kidd.

Law followed Kidd behind the bamboo shack. On the edge of the roof was a small brazier, the charcoal within glowing red. Kidd knelt to a styrofoam cooler and opened the lid. Resting on the ice were two eyeballs, the meat still attached.

Law felt a little queasy as Kidd stuck a bamboo skewer through each eye, then placed them over the coals. The eyes sizzled as they touched the hot iron, and the smell that filled the air instantly banished all queasiness. Law searched for words to describe the smell, but words failed. It wasn't beef, exactly, nor the smell of pork. It was something different, more substantial. His mouth watered.

After a minute, Kidd sprinkled a pinch of salt and pepper as he flipped the skewers by hand. The eyeballs deflated, the jelly within dripping onto the charcoal, giving the smoke a richness and complexity that again robbed Law of vocabulary.

"You shouldn't over spice these," Kidd said, wiping his hands on his grass skirt. "The meat speaks for itself."

"Sweet Jesus," Law said. "If I don't put that my mouth soon I might go mad."

"Patience," Kidd said.

After a long minute, Kidd lifted a skewer, testing the meat with his finger. He smiled. "They're done."

Kidd offered Law a skewer. Law took the meat and raised it to his trembling lips.

The taste was explosive—salty, smoky, greasy. The flesh of the eyeball

was charred and crisp, crackling between his teeth. The meat around the eye—it defined meat. This *was* meat. All that he'd ever eaten before paled.

The meat melted on his tongue. Law closed his eyes and groaned, savoring the moment, swaying. He felt himself dissolving. He could no longer remember his name. He grew aware of his transcendent connection to everything. He was the spoke of a grand, ceaseless wheel, where the sun rose and fell, rose and fell, warming the predators of the world as they devoured the innocent. He was the center, holding. The moment stretched on, his body vibrating, until he heard a crunch.

He opened his eyes to find Kidd chewing the other eyeball.

As Kidd swallowed, Law watched his throat with a hungry eye. Kidd's eyes were closed and Law studied his face. It seemed radiant, beatific—even holy. Law focused on Kidd's mouth—his youthful lips full and pink, gleaming with the grease of the now vanished meat. A few flecks of black pepper rested on the lips, and a single, shining crystal of salt sat at the crease of the mouth, tempting, enticing. Law wanted to lean forward, to place his lips on Kidd's lips, to run his tongue along the grease, the pepper, the salt, to suck out the echo of the eye that lingered in Kidd's saliva. Alas, there are social norms that render certain actions taboo, and these taboos are mighty, mightier even than eyeball consumption euphoria.

Law broke the uncomfortable intimacy by mumbling, "So much for you being a vegetarian."

Kidd slowly opened his eyes, returning from whatever heaven the

meat had transported him to. He stared blankly at Law as he processed the words. He smirked.

"I said mostly."

"Hey Kidd," a voice called from the other side of the shack. "Is the stew self serve, or what? I see your damn monkey's been sampling it."

It was the mayor—his brash voice was instantly recognizable.

"Help yourself, Mayor," Kidd said.

Kidd looked at Law. "You want some stew?"

"After what I've just had, I fear it would only disappoint."

Kidd looked hurt.

"I mean no offense," said Law. "You are a cook of incomparable artistry, and I have no doubt that the stew is pure ambrosia. It's just ..."

"No need to explain," said Kidd. "I felt the same the first time I tasted it."

Law nodded. A long second of silence passed between them, then another. There was something that needed to be said, but neither of them wanted to go first.

In the end, it was Kidd who risked the question.

"So, did you get . . . ?"

"Yes," said Law. "This morning."

"Watch the videotape?"

"Yes. He put some work into this."

"And?" Kidd asked.

"They found a boat washed up on Shackleford Banks," said Law. "It held a suicide note. If the blood tests as his, the case is closed in my book. And the FBI isn't going to waste time on some nut-job's delusions."

"He was crazy, you know," said Kidd.

"I can't say that I know that," said Law. "But I do know one thing. I've tasted what you can do with meat."

Kidd shrugged, looking modest.

Law licked his lips, tasting the memory. "No fair man could judge it a crime."



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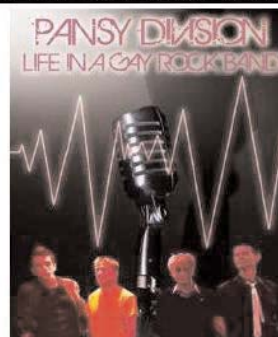
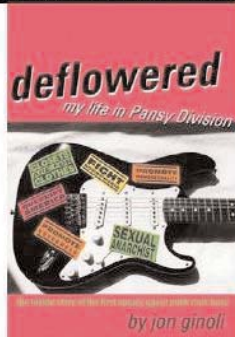
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# "Five Minutes With: James Protzman"

by Heather Hoffmann

In vast departure from my last five minutes with an author who was using a *nom de plume* and hiding behind a veil, in this piece I know exactly who I'm interviewing: It's Chapel Hill's James Protzman. I had the pleasure of meeting James at his reading at Market Street Books in Southern Village. **Jesus Swept** is his first novel. James has been nice enough to agree to an interview.

**Heather Hoffmann:** Because of the magical realism in *Jesus Swept*, I am wondering if at any point during the writing you felt like some sort of magic had transpired in your personal life. Was there any occurrence big (like a miracle) or small (like a coincidence) that made you think, okay, that's interesting...?

**James Protzman:** I've never thought about this question, but I have a good answer. There has been at least one big miracle in my life. I have turned into a pretty nice person and learned how to have fun. Well, maybe not all the time, but still. It's in my consciousness in a way that had never been present over the first 55 years of my life.

The other miracle is that I have learned to listen to the wisdom of my daughter, Lily. At 18, she is perhaps the nicest person on the planet.

**HH:** You have a degree in journalism. Is there a piece that is your most important to date?

**JP:** I'd have to point to the essay "Dear Women" available at <http://www.blunc.com/node/1322> on the Internet.

**HH:** Who is your favorite journalist and why?

**JP:** My favorite journalist is Kirk Ross, publisher of the Carrboro Citizen in North Carolina. He's a friend, but more important, he's passionate about journalism, right here at home.

**HH:** Did you worry that using a Christian name in the title could keep some readers at bay?

**JP:** It's been a mixed blessing, pun intended. But yes, the title scares some people away. I originally wanted to introduce the book under three separate titles, but that idea didn't fly. If I had self-published, that's definitely what I would have done. I might try to sweet talk my publisher into reconsid-

ering that approach for the exact reason you're asking about.

**HH:** If you could interview an author, which one would you most like to interview?

**JP:** This probably isn't a fair answer, but I'm going to sneak it in. I would like to interview the Dalai Lama. He has a cameo appearance in the novel — it's one of my favorite parts.

**HH:** Along those same lines, what would you want to ask him and what would you be uncomfortable asking?

**JP:** I would ask him to talk about anger. And I would find that uncomfortable.

**HH:** Can *Jesus Swept* be classified as Southern literature, why or why not?

**JP:** Absolutely. As you know, *Jesus Swept* is set in North Carolina ... and it evokes a host of Southern stereotypes. Baptist preachers. Duke University intellectualism. Down east trailer trash. Fishing piers. Pine forests. And more. Plus I think the book has a lazy, Southern undercurrent, even though the plot is rip-roaring. At the end, everything settles out to slow and regular — with a twist, of course.

**HH:** What Southern city would you most like to visit on a book reading tour for *Jesus Swept* and why?

**JP:** I'd love to read in Richmond, where I was born. I still have cousins living there, but I'm not sure *Jesus Swept* would go over that well with them. You never know. Beyond that, I'd like to read anywhere on the Atlantic coast. Wilmington. Charleston. Savannah. There's something about the beach that brings my spirit to life.

**HH:** What did you want to be when you were growing up?

**JP:** I had always planned to be an officer in the Navy. Daddy was a retired chief petty officer. Military was all I knew. I lived at Camp Lejeune when I was five ... and then again when I was 25.

**HH:** When you were *Jesus'* age, and here I mean your character Gary, did you think you would ever write a book?

**JP:** No way. I didn't think anything. I just went to church and did my best to behave.

**HH:** Some of the action in your book takes place in Chapel Hill. What do you like the most about living in

Chapel Hill?

**JP:** This will sound weird, but what I like most about Chapel Hill is the zoning. The town has done a remarkably responsible job managing the pressures of its growth. Sure it could do better, but compared to most places, Chapel Hill is a blessing. Second, I love my house. It's pretty darn close to heaven on earth for me. (I've started talking like Hook.)

**HH:** The art on the cover of *Jesus Swept*, what is it? And the J has a hook, of course, is that a special font?

**JP:** After I finished the book, I was Googling around for images and found this strange piece of art called "cross brush." I bought it just for fun. As soon as it arrived, I knew it had to be on the cover of the book. It was a very happy coincidence. My designer, Scott Buzik, of Portland, Oregon, took charge of the typeface to create a hook out of the J.

**HH:** At your reading you mentioned an upcoming novel, "Plaid." Is it preppy?

**JP:** More like the opposite of preppy. I can't really explain the plot right now, because it's still taking shape. But stylistically, it's in the same family as *Jesus Swept*. I might even resurrect a character or two. "Plaid" comes from a growing band of kilt-wearing Christianists who think they have god on their side.

**HH:** I'm really down with the message of *Jesus Swept*. Would you tell *The Blotter* readers about that message, just in case they see any DGBNHF bumper stickers around town.

**JP:** The message of *Jesus Swept* is simple: Do good. Be nice. Have fun. These are the threads of life fully filled. One of my characters explains it best: "*Ah ha,*" says Oscar. "*Venn diagram.*" *He grabs a pen and draws three interlocking circles on a paper towel. "That little space where the circles overlap? That's the sweet spot. Good. Nice. And fun. All at once."*

**HH:** It's been fun! Thank you from *The Blotter*.



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# The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

Please send excerpts from your own dream journals.. If nothing else, we'd love to read them.

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*I sent this yesterday, but your mailbox was full. The background: for nearly 50 years, I have inhabited a serial dream world where I have grown up at night. It is real, with its own geography, maps, roads and routes, that make sense in a very indeterminate way. But they reoccur and the contours of its geography, the towns I am in, somehow reflect a part of the day-life that I live.*

This is a description of tonight, for a friend.

"Thank you also for talking about the Zoloft. I upped the dose today (though you shouldn't feel bad at all about it taking a week or so for me to do this... it took over a year for you to start the antidepressant)."

But the trigger was last night's sleep. Again, uneven and very unsteady.

The most important part though was the dreaming: I was back in my serial life.

That in itself isn't necessarily damning but I was in the dark urban city in the serial world that is almost always a sign that depression is pressing on me... and most revealing I was in the dark building that is always a sign. And I was in the ad agency there that is always one that leaves me feeling rudderless, lost.

There was a difference too. The work there I was doing was good; my staff and peers were supportive, even touching (as I remember it, in both an observational and physical way... nothing sexual, just the sort of body language that I use and appreciate of the little touching gesture, the sort of grounding in physicality). But I was isolated from the agency at large and certainly from the leadership.

There also was the usual elevator episode... the elevator in this building are particularly forbidding, in every way. And an episode of rushing to get out of the building before it closes for the night. (I can't tell you anything specific but I know that being in the building overnight is terrifying but un-rememberable (as opposed to unmemorable), the simple act of trying to remember those episodes brings a feeling inside me like someone is sandpapering all the bones that provide the structure to my body.) This episode of trying to get out, to rush, was particularly graphic (visually and emotionally) because it also involved a new set of circumstances, trying to help a young lady and her four blonde children get organized and out too... they had two strollers for the twins and it was unwieldy and difficult. My office peers helped me help them, but I lost my backpack in the process and knew it was trapped in the building until the next day.

Also I lived in a different house than usual. Usually I am in a gothic, pressing-in townhouse, dark. But this time I lived in a Lloyd Wright-type house, modern, and it was always in the sun (because of the land around it, it had to be in the suburbs which I know you hate, but here I think it gave room for light vs. dark). You could almost say I recognized the neighborhood (from other parts of this serial dream world that has lived with me for 50 years now) but the truth is I didn't recognize the neighborhood, but rather the drive and roads that took me there (from past dreams in the world).

You lived here too, as did Ted and my mother and (maybe) your father. We also had a guest... I am attaching the guest to Chris Mangieri's brother, who divorced about the same time as I was under worst circumstances (he also became the only and custodial parent but his wife ran away with another woman, the worst thing for a guys ego). That attaching could be rational rather than dream world, so I don't know what to do with it.

But somehow Susan (who was like a ghost but never real) was having an affair with him, and Ben was stalking me, thinking that somehow the affairee was me. And I remember thinking, boy, she has really screwed herself this time.

In addition to the elevators, a repetitious theme, I also had another heights episode that drew from others. I was confronted with steps on the way home, and for whatever reason, I bypassed them, knowing I had to make it to the top, instead clawing up a number of stories, by hand, pulling up and climbing up the pole structure that supported the steps. The height and the fear of falling and the moments of nearly losing my grip on one pole or another left me panicked and moving both.

I think that the only way to the transportation home is to use those steps but they are closed and I have to climb on the outside structure... and entice Ted to somehow do the same.

The dream is fading now. It is hard because the landscape is so familiar whenever I go there, both repelling and comforting, but it fades so quickly as I go from dark night to the twilight of waking to the action of being here, in this present. There was much more that I wanted to write, that I tried to hang onto, but it fell off me as I walked from the bed to my laptop."

I have no problems with my name being used... I understand serial dreaming is unusual, and to me this is world as much a part of me as this one, where I write this morning.

Bill Russo

Chapel Hill NC and Santiago, Chile.

## CONTRIBUTORS:

**James Maxey** lives in Hillsborough, NC and is author of several novels and short stories. His most recent novel is the science fiction and fantasy hybrid *Dragonforge*, the middle book of the Dragon Age trilogy that began with 2007's *Bitterwood* and concludes this summer in *Dragonseed*. His short story "Silent as Dust" was included in the newly released anthology *Fantasy: Best of the Year, 2009 Edition*. For more about James and his writing, visit his blog at [jamesmaxey.blogspot.com](http://jamesmaxey.blogspot.com).

**Judy Woodall** - see centerfold

**Dr. Heather Hoffmann** is the author of the blog <http://myacousticmemory.blogspot.com/> and lives in Carrboro, NC.

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