

*It's in our nature...Katrina Johnston, Danielle Cortez,  
Five Minutes with Steve Alten,  
Phil Juliano, and The Dream Journal*

# The Blotter

February 2014

MAGAZINE

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

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FRONT COVER, "Why won't she run?"  
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## "Don't take that tone with me..."

Welcome to the Blotter Magazine Helpdesk. Your call is very important to us, and will be answered in the order in which it was received. Comments may be recorded for quality purposes...

*I thought your last cover was very colorful.* Thank you for saying that. It is one of the gifts of the job of editor that I sometimes run six or seven issues in a row that I think are the best issues ever. Something about them makes them jump out at me, a picture that makes me laugh it's so fine, a story line that I like so much it makes me jealous; an image in a poem I feel blessed to be bringing to readers. Not trying to be maudlin or mawkish here. And isn't it strange that those two words – maudlin and mawkish – are synonyms? One sounds like a flub you make while trying to say the other, doesn't it? I wonder, was one a real word and the other a drunken mistake that made a cartoon in "Punch" and stuck with our slang because of that? And are Kanye or Kim about to coin a word while cooing to their daughter that a hundred years from now will be part of the mainstream vocabulary? Isn't that scary?

*What in the world are you talking about?* Sorry, just that our artists are talented and generous. Our writers and poets are brilliant and look good in hats. I am having a great deal of fun looking for things to show you. Like I shouldn't be, maybe, or else it ought to cause me great pain and effort to do a worthy month's work.

*Are there any changes for us to look forward to in the future?* Oh, yes.

*Something is wrong with your website/e-mail/Twitter account/Facebook presence/blog.* Yes, 'tis true, 'tis true. They're a mess, of that we have no doubt. And why is that? It's 2014. You'd think we'd have a handle on making things better, faster, stronger. But alas this is not the case. Technologically challenged, we've been working on our new and improved website for nearly two years, and none of us has the programming chops so it goes on like the poor Irish monk illuminating a manuscript by tallow-lamp. The fellow who does our monthly updates has about ten minutes of free time for us and we're lucky to have him, but can ask no more than we do. The e-mail problems are my fault – I have ten Mb of space in my inbox and it's always full of Facebook notifications or e-bombs. Our Facebook thing is up-to-date but it keeps breaking the e-mail box and don't even get me started with Twitter (no, really, don't get me started with Twitter. I have no idea what good it would do us: *Hey, ya'll we have a great new story coming in our next month's issue you're gonna love it I swear happy face how many characters is that?* On the third hand we're still wrapping our

heads around how a blog might be different from the magazine itself, and will probably figure this out just in time for blogs to be passé. And then there is the writer who asked me if we have a newsletter. Hmm...

*I've noticed that you been taking a more noticeably political viewpoint on things. Isn't that risky?* Yes, but we've decided that it's safe enough to stand united against the House Committee on Un-American Activities, as long as we all agree under duress that we thought it was based on a TV show doctor.

*Do you find self-effacing humor clever?* Why yes, we do. Everything else; cynicism, sarcasm, puns, doctor/rabbi jokes, prop humor, all pale in comparison.

*When I go to my normal place to get a copy of The Blotter, sometimes it's not there.* That's a pretty common mistake. It's possible that you should have turned left on Fordham Boulevard when you came to the intersection with the wonky traffic light. You know, the one with the Staples on one corner and that real estate office I can't remember the name of on the other.

*No, I mean The Blotter isn't there, you idiot.* Now there's no need to take that tone with me. I'm doing the best I can. I'm so sorry for your trouble, and I'm as unhappy about this as you are. If you give me your snail-mail address, I'll send you two copies of last month's issue.

*Why would I want two copies?* A good question. To take to the coffee shop and share. To give as gifts. To read stereoscopically. To safely line the cage of your budgerigar. Because more is always better.

*Does your supervisor know you're behaving like this?* Oh, he does now.

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

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CAUTION

*A secretary is not a toy,  
no my boy, not*

# “Capital N is for Nachos”

by Katrina Johnston

My neighbour, Dave, lives down the hall. I've checked him out because I'm careful when it comes to guys. I don't think he's a homicidal maniac, and he's probably not a deranged idiot. He doesn't appear to be untrustworthy or abusive. I guess he's okay; an honest guy. He is about my age, perhaps in his late twenties. But sill, I wonder? He's always grinning like a crazy goofball and asking me out. I suppose he's a fine young man and exactly the kind of guy my mother would approve. He's clean-shaven, wears neat clothes and there are no visible tattoos or piercings. I wonder if he's safe?

My hesitation comes from my failed history with relationships. I've picked out some bonafide losers - non-supportive types: strong, silent, predictable - guys who spend their weekends puttering around garages and drinking, only to scoff down dinner and TV sports followed by snacks and more TV sports. Kind of a bore really.

So, I'm single and happy at 27. Right now, I'm dancing in solitude and not considering another guy? 'Least that's what I tell myself - not even if he's a friendly harmless or a guy who becomes my platonic friend. No one need apply! I am free.

Dave; however, is actually

quite charming without being overly sweet. And, he's tall and attractive, with thick sandy hair and hazel eyes. On the occasions that I have run into him, I've always been super aware of precisely where he is, where he is looking or how he moves about or stands. He's interested in me. I've got his attention. And, he's interesting to me. But, I don't like this feeling. I mean, that I'm so hyper aware of him or experiencing any attraction. Besides, if I did agree to go out with him - it would be only a social thing. Right, I'd make sure of that.

Couple of weeks ago, when we ran into each other at Second Cup, he invited me to Aubrey's for lunch. Because it was a public place, I agreed. I suppose that was one official first date. We had a few laughs. Still, a woman can't be too careful. And, I can't help but wonder - Is he safe?

On Friday afternoon, I encountered Dave beside the mailboxes in the hallway.

“Karen! Why don't you come over tonight,” he said. His eyes glittered. “I mean, we'll catch a movie.

I'll rent a good one and whip up a great snack.”

My radar swept round and round. I shuffled my feet back and forth. He seemed genuinely serious; sincere. Reminded me of my Uncle John who is a warm and humorous man - bit of a nut, but a nice nut. However, there is always another nagging question, the one I struggle with, as all women must. Could this guy that I've just so recently met be after sex and nothing more? He must have been a bit old-school too because he was still renting movies rather than uploading from the internet.

Dave was waiting for me to reply. He was standing close beside me, maybe too close? He smelled of peppermints. The hallway lights are bright and garish. I couldn't think of a polite way to decline.

“Wine.” he said. “Do you prefer red or white?”

I took a moment. “Ummm, red, yeah - red - lots of red. I mean - several different kinds.... I mean, one kind at a time, I mean, I think I'll zip my lip right now.”

We laughed. I examined the floral pattern of the hallway carpet near my feet.

“I suppose a movie night would be alright.” I said and wondered why I'd caved. He looked so

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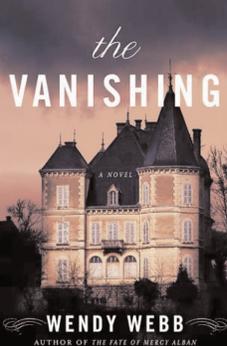
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# BULL SPEC

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**GUIDE TO LOCAL EVENTS**



**FEBRUARY 1** (Saturday) Chapel Hill's Flyleaf Books hosts **Wendy Webb** for her ghost/occult novel *The Vanishing*. 11 am.

**FEBRUARY 21-23** (Friday-Sunday) MystiCon in Roanoke, VA with guests John de Lancie, Todd McCaffery, and A.J. Hartley.

**MARCH 7** (Friday) Raleigh's Quail Ridge Books hosts #1 NYT bestselling author **Kim Harrison** for *The Undeal Pool*. 7:30 pm.

**MARCH 17** (Monday) Chapel Hill's Flyleaf Books hosts the "Three Nightmares You Can't Resist" tour with authors Kristen Simmons, Mindee Arnett, and Jenna Black. 7 pm.

**APRIL 5-6** (Saturday-Sunday) 2014 North Carolina Literary Festival hosted by the NCSU Libraries at NC State University.

boyishly appealing. Besides, I rationalized to myself, I should probably give this whole idea of openness and trust a little more latitude. "I get to choose the show," I told him.

"Of course. In fact, at this very moment, I'm off to the Video Inn. What would you like to see?"

"Let me think. A show that's not overtly a chick flick or a guy flick either. No car smashups or tear jerkers. Something funny. How about a Will Ferrell or a Tina Fey or another comedy. Maybe even Mike Myers?"

He saluted me then, a strange theatrical gesture. "Aye aye my captain. We'll laugh right out loud." He coughed. "Harr de Harr." It was his turn to shuffle his feet and stare down at the hallway carpet. "Got it Karen. Nothing crappy or really sappy. Why don't you plan on coming over at 6:30?"

When I arrived, Dave confessed. "I've been a miserable failure at the video store. Dismal. The comedy section was kinda wiped clean. They're clearing out their classic stock. Nothing else seemed reasonable. Capital N for Nothing. But, guess what? *The Devil Wears Prada* is on TV tonight."

"I've already seen that one."

Dave's smile extinguished like someone spun a dimmer switch.

"I don't mind watching it again."

He grinned then, his big toothy smile, like an overgrown kid. "Trouble is my cable's been discon-

nected," Dave went on smiling, "but, I've improvised this aerial thing." He unfurled a long white cable with a stick at one end and he pulled it along the floor towards the sofa where I sat.

"The metal rod is from my venetian blinds." Dave pointed. "It's the pole from the side - the winder pole."

Dave had attached the three-foot length of metal rod to the inner exposed wire that protrudes from the coaxial cable cord, binding metal against metal with a wad of duct tape that made an awkward but flexible elbow joint. Dave could point the rod in any direction; the long cord, still connected at the other end to the back of the TV, could be strung out wherever he wanted.

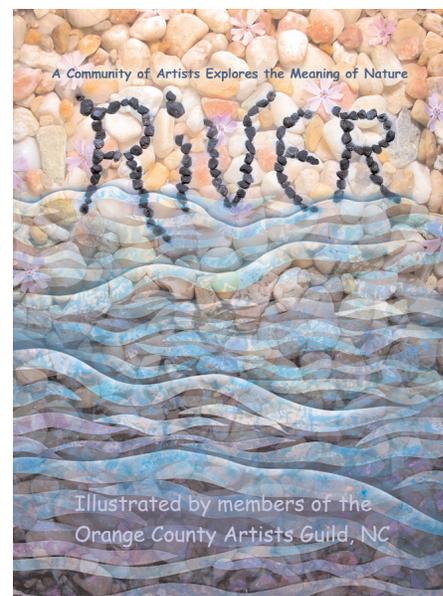
Dave turned on the TV and wielded his magic wand like Darth Vader swings a light sabre. The picture and sound reception fluctuated. The focus wouldn't settle. We stared into static and snow. Dave directed his metal rod this way and that way. He walked in a pattern as if he dowsed for water.

"It usually works after a bit of fiddling," he explained. "I just need to find the correct angle." We stared some more. Dave pointed the wand left, right, at the window, then away, then back at the TV. Finally, he dropped the stick beside me. "Damn." The TV image flickered insolently, threatened to clear, but only briefly. "Damn thing," he said again: "Double damn. Triple damn.

It's always worked before."

"Let me try." I picked up the metal rod and cradled it on my hands. I managed to clear the static. Then the picture held steady. I gingerly positioned the wand on my knees. The electromagnetic energy funnelled through me. I wondered why my physical body seemed to be the best conductor. Would the TV waves be detrimental to my health and well-being? "Hey, I'm the aerial," I said, trying to dispel these little unfounded worries.

"You're perfect. Karen. Now, hold still, don't move." Dave said. "The show is starting."



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## The Blotter

"Good thing I don't have to visit the loo."

"Sit tight," Dave said. "I've still got my surprise."

I heard him in the kitchen, opening cupboards, the fridge, mixing and pouring. The microwave whirred. Dave came back carrying a serving tray, laden with a platter that was heaped with nachos, a tub of sour cream and two gigantic glasses of red wine. The nachos were magnificent; a high mountain resplendent with salsa and green peppers, onions, bacon bits, spices and tons of cheese - lava flows of melted cheese. "Nachos with a capital N," he said. And Dave looked like he'd bust wide open with pride. At that moment, I trusted - even the TV.

Then, Dave stumbled over the cable. The tray shot from his hands like it was launched for two points from the foul line. Dave's body

lurched. He fell. The nachos, the platter, the glasses of red wine arced through open air, like meteors and galaxies expanding.

It was nasty. Wine ejected everywhere - on the window frame, puddles on some books on the floor. The capital N Nachos splashed to earth, upside down of course, with a horrible squelch as they landed in the middle of Dave's carpet. The tub of sour cream was an ugly spill - fanned out like an instant glacier, splayed on a background of grey wool carpet. Strangely, the glassware bounced and rolled without breakage.

I could see reddish-purplish speckles of wine dribbling on the walls. Dave's floor lamp was hit, the shade stained crimson. Trails of wine seeped into crevices at the baseboard heat register, sizzled and left tracers of wispy smoke.

"Oh.... Sheeee...." Dave

pulled himself up. He stood there frozen. "Oyy...."

The TV screen reverted to crappy.

In the kitchen, I ran warm water onto dish rags. I shoved a cloth into Dave's hands. "The books first," I said, "Before it soaks into the pages."

We began the mop up. It was difficult to decide exactly what to tackle with so much mess. I wiped the walls and re-rinsed dish rags. From the kitchen, Dave brought back a spoon and a fork and the garbage tin. He scraped sour cream and raked the nachos from the carpet. Together, we worked and wiped and rinsed and ran back and forth to the kitchen sink. I looked down at the burgundy wine stains on my right pant leg.

"Oh, Karen," Dave said, "Your jeans too! I'm so sorry." He was sprawled on the floor, prying bits of cheese out of carpet fibres with the tines of the fork. "This isn't how I planned it - not at all."

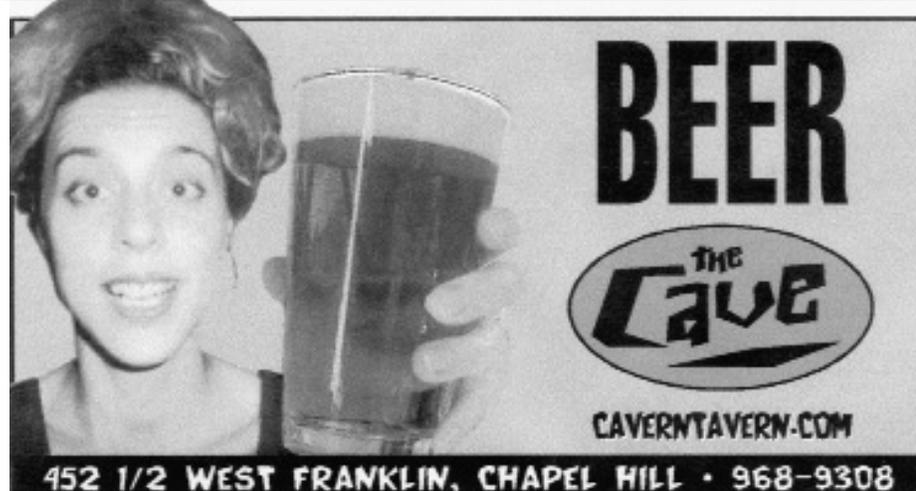
"I know Dave," I told him. "I think I'd better head back to my apartment to deal with this stain before it sets. These are my favourite jeans."

"But the movie?"

I laughed. "Half over."

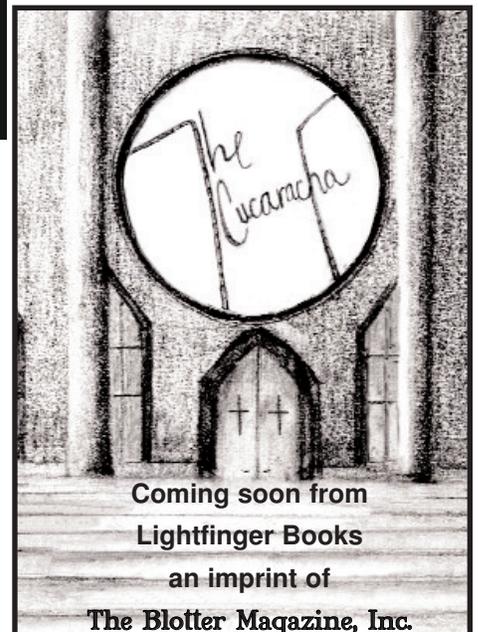


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## Five Minutes With: Steve Alten

"Yeah I guess so. But, are you really goin' home right now?"

I considered the situation. Hapless Dave - but he seemed so without guile, someone I might dare to trust. And, optimism surfaced. I didn't know exactly why or how.

"Yep," I said. "I'm hungry too," I spoke honestly. I was famished. Then I looked at Dave, boldly this time, right into his fiery eyes, and I said: "I've got some left-over sandwiches. I could bring them back here. Give me about 15 minutes."

"Capital P Plan," Dave said. "That's great. I'm so so sorry about all this. We'll try a movie night again sometime. Not exactly like this one. Okay?" He sighed happily. "I mean," he said. "I'd like to try - again."

"Don't get up," I told him. "You need to keep working on that cheese before it petrifies."

"But, I'm over the moon that you're actually going to come back here," he said. "You seem so understanding. I could? I mean we could still laugh right out loud."

No matter which way things went, I knew that I'd at least acquired a friend, somehow. I judged him this way - a good friend and an honest one. "So Dave, I said "Next time, if there is a next time," I hesitated. "I rent or download the movie. Okay?"

"Okay."

I closed the door quietly.

Safe? I felt safe.

But Dave was definitely not to be trusted around nachos, sour cream, wine and a few other things like improvised TV aerials.



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I have a dent in my head. Not a particularly big dent and no, it doesn't hurt. And I really can't explain it - apparently I've had it for a while because I don't remember bumping my head. Although it is quite possible it is just the way the pieces of my skull came together during their formative years. On the other hand, it is also quite plausible that I took a stick to the bean as a child. Well, if this is the case, I have a few culprits who are on the list. We grew up in pre-tweet times and anything went back then. You could sock someone or tell them they were an asshole and all they could do was sock you back or tell on you. Kids were tough. Big deal, right?

It could be a recent bump, of course. Maybe it's knocked the memory out of me. Maybe I'm someone completely different than the person I am now. Maybe my wife and the girls like me better this way. Maybe they aren't my wife and daughters, but found me by the side of a road. If you know the truth, don't tell me. I don't want to know.

So this dent is part of me. How much a part of who I am, I can't say. Maybe it causes my lack of practical math skills, or prevents me from bungee jumping off of high bridges. Or maybe it provides me the occasional well-crafted poem. Or perhaps nothing at all is causal to this cranial fault. Like it's nobody's fault! I don't know.

Smarter people than I do, though. I have a good friend that has a PhD in...oh, hell, I don't even know and even if I did know it wouldn't make sense to me. To quote Good Will Hunting, "my friend's wicked smart." I could ask her, see what she thinks about the ability of

trauma or damage to the brain to cause behavior, and based on where my indentation is, what kind of behavior modification I might be experiencing. That might be interesting. Of course, she could lie to me, tell me anything she wanted to, and I'd believe it.

Which brings me via the great-circle route to a book I read recently: *The Omega Project*, by Steve Alten. I followed the rule - the one I've had for many years - that you give every book placed before you a fair shake. That's thirty -five pages. It's reasonable to expect an author to get enough in front of you in that span to grab you. So I opened *The Omega Project*. Began to read. And now I can't tell you anything at all about it. I mean, I read the book - buried myself in it - and I can't tell you anything else because I don't want to spoil for you what I got to experience.

That's really unsatisfactory, isn't it? Well I hate spoilers. My sister calls me sometimes and informs me I desperately need to go see a movie and I tell her immediately to not say anything about it. Nothing! And she says OK, but I just have to see how Angelina Jolie looks as an animated wife of Beowulf and how the music at the end when Kevin Costner leaves the snowy valley will make me weep. And I do. I weep and gnash my teeth in frustration, because *everything* is a spoiler to me. So what can I say about *The Omega Project*? It's in the future, and that future is coming right at us at full speed. It is the best of times and the worst of times, from a certain point of view. There's a guy nicknamed Ike. He's...no, I can't tell you that. Does it suffice to say that Mr. Alten is due

# The Blotter

for an episode of “Science Fiction Profits” on *The History Channel* and that the story is kind of William Gibson meets William S. Burroughs, with a dash of Jacques Cousteau with nitrous oxide in his scuba tanks? God, just read the thing. It’s a kick in the head! And if you can’t trust me, who can you trust?

Why am I taking this tone? Because these are tough times for positive book reviews. Nobody trusts them anymore, because there is an industry of such things out there. What’s an author to do? They are responsible for getting their own marketing done. To get grassroots support, they have to bring social media tools to bear. Early and often, they have to ask favors. A positive review can be a sticky wicket. Real or not, we assume the latter.

Arthur C. Clarke said “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.” My fourteen year old is taking freshman honors biology and she is flirting with the hinterlands of magic, as far as I’m concerned. She has also discovered a certain teenaged-what-passes-for-joy asking me questions she knows I don’t know. *Hey, Dad? What is a ribosome?* I have just as much fun letting her know that I am well aware of what she is attempting to do and answer the questions with utter nonsense. *What? Oh. A ribosome is a random*

*access memory chip planted in children when they are born so that parents can return them for cost-recovery, minus any usage based on post-natal years extant.* She groans satisfyingly and I go back to my work. It’s what we do.

In the same vein (same in the crazy non-linear thought processes I often have) I read that physicists are performing an experiment to prove that existence is not a computer simulation. Or that it is. I guess it depends on the physicist.

And if that’s not enough for you, other physicists (I think they face-time each other at parties) are performing experiments to see if the galaxy is a hologram. This smacks of derivative work, if you ask me. Someone really smart needs to be making sure that all this is on the up and up. My wicked-smart friend smiles at this kind of comment. Who, she asks, is smart enough to make sure that all this is on the up and up? The very people performing the experiment. It makes me think back to when I cared about SATs and such. A long time ago, yes. Who was ensuring that the Princeton folks were correct? I was certain that some of my answers were both correct and clever, and worth double-points, like at the grocery store. The ones that were clever, but wrong, maybe three-fourths credit. At least let’s negotiate.

Anyhow, this particular arti-

cle has led me to wonder if it matters whether or not I wear my seatbelt. Or go to church. Or return that phone call I ignored a moment ago. If it’s all a simulation, a la *The Matrix*, shouldn’t I be spending my time less productively? Behaving like the Man of La Mancha or sticking it to The Man (or whatever is in charge of this electronic shenanigan). Ah, reality, we hardly knew ye.

Which brings me back to Mr. Alten’s novel. I liked it so much that I interviewed the author. I think he feels I was being flippant in my questions. Maybe, inadvertently, I was. I wish there was something I could say about it that was neither superlative nor spoiler-revelatory. I can’t. It’s very good and I feel like I’ve said too much already...

Editor: So many marvelous quotes at chapter-starts. I know it’s a minor thing, compared to plot and character development, but they certainly create mood. Do you collect pithy sayings, and save them to insert at appropriate times?

Steve Alten: Each book I look for quotes that set the mood. In *Grim Reaper*; *End Of Days* and my soon-to-be-released *Sharkman* (Aug. 2014) I use a lot of Doors lyrics. “Omega” leaned toward spiritual quotes.

Ed: It took me far fewer than the



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mandatory 35 pages to be totally engrossed in your narrative – to me the entire story is one of modern misdirection and what happens when you stop being responsible for yourself (and others). But there were also incisive “moments of author insight,” such as the hologram conversation with the Ann-Coulterish yahoo, who altered her avatar to be a busty bim-bette, and Ike seeing through the disguise. How do you respond to the accusation that you seem to put a fair amount of your own perspective about politics, social accountability, relationships, religion, into the book makes it a fun read, a better document, deeper (something like that)?

SA: I call ‘em as I see ‘em. And I call people out when they choose to wreak havoc in our world. Read *The Shell Game*; I received serious email threats from that one.

Ed: Did you find the previous question long and confusing? So did we. Do you like attending book-signings and readings and “cons” and trying to deal with such fan-tasm? Or do you prefer the hunkering down in your writing world, carving rough stone into the next gem? Are you a home-office kind of writer, or a coffee-shop/laptop guy?

SA: I live on my own island in my home office. Book signings are fine

when the store advertises the appearance, otherwise it can be depressing. I prefer to speak at high schools through my Adopt-An-Author reading program. It’s a different dynamic addressing 700 teens who read your book and have questions.

Ed: Is Ike some portion of future you, or even a past-you? What proportion of Ike is you and what proportion, say, Spider-man?

SA: Ha. Funny thing – Ike is based on my favorite professor at Penn State. When I emailed him out of the blue and told him I had made him the main character in *The Omega Project*, he was blown away. Last time I saw Ike was in 1981. There’s always a little of me in the character, usually the scared part. I put my characters through hell.

Ed: I must tell you that I had a mutually agreed to plan for where your story was taking place – you created an apocalyptic GDO planet full – or rather less-full – of zombie/Mad Max folks just looking for Ike to join and/or eat and I droolingly agreed to read about it. Did you do this with any intention of coming back to the GDO in another novel?

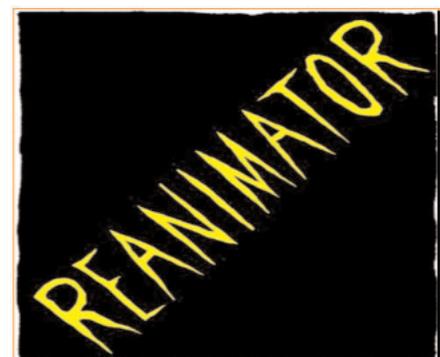
SA: The theme is present in several novels, including *The Shell Game*, *Sharkman*, and the novel I am pen-

ning now; *Vostok*.

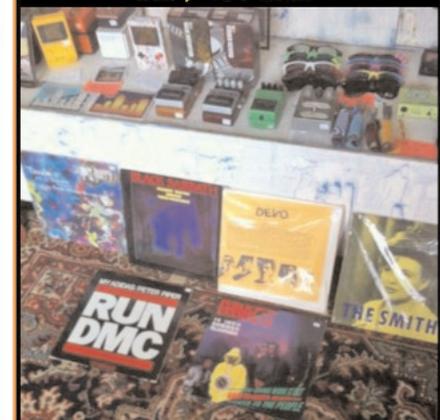
Ed: Tell us about the science – it often sent me scurrying to Wikipedia. Did you talk to SMEs about lunar gravity and plate tectonics and biomes and DNA and robotics and Eastern philosophy and cloning and heuristic learning and group dynamics and cryogenics and plastics and doomsday survival, or are you just one of those really annoying people who knows a lot about everything? (sorry, did that question come out unfair and unbalanced?)

SA: I know enough to spend hundreds of hours each novel researching the details, then writing them in digestible passages.

Ed: I loved the idea about solar locomotives. Jeff “Skunk” Baxter, former guitarist for the Doobie Brothers decided to learn more about sound and recording and ended up becom-



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## The Blotter

ing engrossed in theoretical missile defense. Are you on the civilian subcommittee for practical alternative energy transportation? When do you plan to deploy these?

SA: I've never been invited, but I've created devices in past novels that need to be funded.

Ed: Who are your muses – who inspires your “spec-fic” (that sounds so lame compared to Sci-Fi) juices? Any old heroes?

SA: My father was my hero; not sure about the muses. But there are people doing inspiring things out there that inspire me.

Ed: Who are you reading? What's on your bedside table?

SA: I rarely read novels these days because I'm always writing. I do read the newspaper every day, *TIME*, *Sports Illustrated*, and the Philly Sports pages (go Eagles). There's a bottled water on my bedside table... and a pen and legal pad for those random thoughts and dreams.

Ed: Time's up. Thanks!



## The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

Please send excerpts from your own dream journals. If nothing else, we'd love to read them. We won't publish your whole name.

[mermaid@blotterrag.com](mailto:mermaid@blotterrag.com)

This was a two-parter (although unrelated, they seemed to be reflective of one another). First I was raising pigeons in my basement, which was an unbelievably rambling affair with lots of little rooms and windows and subterranean pools of fresh water crossed by walkways made of two-by-fours hammered together in that way that little boys do, with lots of misfires hanging out all bent and rusty. Upstairs there was an exit to a local auto dealership with real jerks for salesmen. I went upstairs with a broken piece of two-by-four and threw it through one of the big plate glass windows of the car dealership. I have no idea why. Out came the boss-salesman carrying a long two-by-four of his own, all the better to beat me with. He was blonde with a 1970's cheese-mustache and had a southern accent. I fended him off with a piece of one-by which I parried and thrust. (Could this be interpreted as penis-envy? God I hope not.) Finally I tossed the piece of lumber at him and took off.

Secondly, I was at a meeting/after work get together in a local watering hole in a hotel. Different place, different job. There was a spread of cookies and crackers and cheese and we were sitting and eating and talking about one guy in our office who had “screwed the pooch” by going off on a bunch of employees – he had an unusually bad day. One guy came into the room and told us that he was in a different room in the hotel where there were strippers. He advised us that their meeting was going better than ours. When the guy who had a bad day found out that everyone was talking about him, he was going to resign, or at least go home. He had hair like John Travolta in “Saturday Night Fever.” When he went out to get in his car, I followed him and told him that this was just a bad day, there would always be bad days, but he was a good employee, and shouldn't take this to heart. He nodded, but otherwise ignored me.

C. B. S. - cyberspace

# "Bayard Rustin"

by Danielle Cortez

I am a tortured genius  
 I changed lives by doing works that were uniquely brilliant and completely misunderstood,  
 all the while I was going through emotional torture  
 I am Bayard Rustin  
 My name has always in the background, in the atmosphere

I was the artist, the sculptor, the Leonardo da Vinci  
 of the 1963 March on Washington  
 A black gay activist that challenged homophobia and racism throughout my life  
 I made invaluable contributions to the rights  
 Why was I denied my place of recognition in the public?

"When an individual is protesting society's refusal to acknowledge his dignity as a human being,  
 his very act of protest confers dignity on him."

I was born in West Chester Pennsylvania  
 I aint know my paw  
 I found out my 16 year old sister Florence was really my maw.  
 I was raised by my Quaker grandparents  
 they painted my foundation like a Van Gogh,  
 with ideas of social justice, humility,  
 and a commitment to non-violence, truthfulness, and tranquility.

Age 15,  
 I played a little football  
 wrote poems in the music hall,  
 but I always preferred the company of young men and not pretty girls all in all  
 A fact of my freakish genius nature

"I think the gay community has a moral obligation.... to do whatever is possible to encourage  
 more and more gays to come out of the closet."

I relocated to Harlem  
 Earned a living as a nightclub singer  
 That's when I decided to study.  
 I was an accomplished tenor vocalist.  
 Hell, they gave me scholarships to sang.  
 I loved to sang  
 like Vivaldi and Mozart loved to compose  
 My first masterpiece was when  
 I sang out loud for the young communist league.  
 I quit  
 once I was ordered to not protest racial segregation.  
 I was already one of the FBI's most major frustrations.

"I am not ready to die, I want no Negro to die, I want no human being to die or to be brutalized

# The Blotter

because I thoroughly believe that this struggle can be won without brutalization.”

I am a tortured genius  
I changed lives by doing works that were uniquely brilliant and completely misunderstood,  
all the while I was going through emotional torture  
I am Bayard Rustin  
My name has always in the background, in the atmosphere.

Age 30,  
I began to make some mistakes  
Began to have some bad breaks  
As a tortured genius the madness took over  
Traveling the country to speak out about the congress of racial equality  
I boarded a bus in Louisville going to Nashville  
I sat in the second row.  
The driver asked me to move to the back  
I refused and would not go  
13 miles before Nashville  
I was beaten  
and arrested

Age 32,  
I was arrested for failing to appear before the draft board  
Sentenced to 3 years  
I only served 26 months  
I made them mad with protests and my open homosexuality in the ward  
They transferred me to a higher security prison.

“The Proof that one truly believes.... is in action.”

Age 41,  
I was arrested for lewd conduct,  
Allegedly for a sexual act involving  
two white men in the back of an automobile  
I was attacked by society as an immoral influence  
I pleaded guilty to a lesser charge of “sexual perversion”

## Best In Show Comic

by Phil Juliano



There goes the emotional torture like a noose worn around my neck  
 I just wanted to be free.  
 I stayed out of the spotlight.  
 I became a mentor, a consultant, an advisor.  
 I lent support to Dr King.  
 His views of non-violent tactics was nonexistence.  
 I convinced him to abandon his armed protection  
 Including his own personal handgun.  
 Then he asked me to help organize Southern Christian Leadership Conference

“We need in every community a group of angelic troublemakers.”

Dr King was warned  
 If I did not step down  
 The world would hear a hum  
 Of false allegations that we were gay lovers  
 instead of the tortured geniuses we had become.  
 King cancelled the march.  
 He distanced himself from me.  
 I resigned

Suddenly, there was a brighter day. A national mobilization.  
 My friends spoke with anticipation.  
 My anxiety continuously hit my stomach and my mental with panic punches.  
 I had so many challenges  
 From toilets, to first aide,  
   to buttons, to buses and lunches  
 But then  
 Marian and Mahalia sang like it was the coming of the Joan of Arc  
 I cut off my own ear as I read the demands of the march.

Only 4 arrests that day.  
 All of them white people  
 Dr King received the Nobel Peace Prize  
 I ended up on the cover of life magazine  
 I stayed out of sight as I was advised

“We are all one... and if we don't know it, we will learn it the hard way”

I am a tortured genius  
 I changed lives by doing works that were uniquely brilliant and completely misunderstood,  
 all the while I was going through emotional torture.  
 I am Bayard Rustin  
 My name has always been in the background, in the atmosphere.

## “My Aunt Denise” by Danielle Cortez

It never fails to amuse me how my aunt Denise has always been able to  
curse me out and love me all in the same sentence

“Son of a bitch, you made it huh?”

She’s lived in the same corner home  
in the 7th ward of New Orleans  
since she was a chosen teenage bride  
and because of this,  
she’s a boiling over pot of resentment and bitterness  
with a side of yall can kiss my grits

Her front porch has always been the meeting place for family affairs.  
A slab of concrete with solid stone steps.  
A garden bench and two stone potted plants and  
I’ve always loved watching her long dusty gray hair like a used mop  
Her blue eyes smoked over in cataracts  
While she chain smokes Virginia Slims and drinks her coffee from a plastic cup,  
The Mello Joy  
see that’s the original Cajun coffee  
She has never cared for appearances  
Her age tells me her facade was never meant to be impressionable  
but bold as Cealy’s hex to mister in the color purple

Over the years I return to sit and conversate  
I would listen to her version of the stories  
Her truths a thousand times over  
While she may be brewing some gumbo or some etouffee  
She would ask her questions  
and give her answers  
in a very matter of fact-ly way

My spitfire of an aunt is where I first learned never to hold my tongue  
To allow my inner sorceress to be wild and restrainable  
An irresistible enchantment  
I’ve always held on to her take me as I am or you can fuck off attitude  
Just like I hold on to pain meds for those just in case moments  
Just in case someone wants to test my powers  
Just in case someone wants to pick at my wild blood flowers

Down the road, just over the bridge, over some waters we call the swamps  
is where my Aunt Denise lives  
She gives a willing ear to the words of my deepest complications

Like when I am lost  
 And I have to bury family ghosts  
 In all too familiar mausoleums  
 that are stacked and sealed like sky high safety deposit boxes  
 that hold the treasured souls of those nearest  
 Our mothers and grandmothers  
 Our daughter and sons  
 Our babies and brothers  
 Yes, most of our loved ones

Now since Katrina, the porch has had a cosmetic makeover  
 But the soul of the porch and my aunt has remained unstirred and untouched  
 She will always be a witch of wisdom to me  
 An alchemy of strange guidance in my family  
 To be admired for her predictions on life  
 and how she perceives it will turn out  
 If only this immortality had an everlasting duration  
 If only I could inherit her crystal ball of simple revelations

## CONTRIBUTORS:

**Katrina Johnston** is the winner of the *CBC Canada Writes True Winter Tale* (2011). Works of short fiction may be found at *Sliver of Stone*, *Cigale Literary Magazine*, *The Missing Slate*, *Alberta's Horizon Magazine* and at others. She lives in Victoria, BC, Canada. The goal of her fiction is to shine a candle into dark and hidden places.

**Danielle "Blaize" Cortez** always had a love for poetry writing. As she grew into her voice, she began sharing her works in front of audiences. Affectionately known as a spit-fire, Danielle writes poetry that carries a profound appreciation for heartfelt honesty and a passion against all prejudices. As a Baton Rouge native by way of Chicago, Danielle's poetry has inherited her deep southern charm and authenticity. She and her partner now reside in Raleigh, North Carolina where she is a very active member in the LGBT community utilizing poetry as her vehicle for change.

**Phil Juliano** has been cartooning for over twenty years. His comic strip, "Best In Show", is a visual interpretation of his daily life and struggle to find his place in society. He's a beer snob, baseball fan and avid outdoorsman, usually all at the same time. "Best In Show" is currently being featured in several newspapers and magazines and is syndicated by MCT Campus where it is distributed to college and university newspapers across the country. Along with his comic strip, Phil creates humorous illustrations for magazines and books as well as custom Matchbox car designs. He is an active member of the National Cartoonists Society and lives in Minneapolis with his wife Rachael and their two dogs, Spencer and Sierra. Tony and his zombie friends live next door. To see more of Phil's work go to [www.bestinshowcomic.com](http://www.bestinshowcomic.com)



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*xxooxoox - The Blotter Gang*