

Get on up with Nicholas Scena, Doug Mathewson,
John Grey, Joe Buonfiglio,
Phil Juliano, and The Dream Journal

The Blotter

June 2016

MAGAZINE

On the far side of the driveway, the grass grew so tall that it went to seed and would hide a full grown basset hound, if one chose to walk such a dog there.

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"Background 1.0"

First memory was of being out in the sun, in the tall grass, and being able to see it even though for months my eyes had been blacked out like windows during an air-raid drill, covered with soft mole-skin pads and not-so soft gauze bandage, wrapped round and round my head, my hair flattened, my ears flattened. How could I have this memory, contradictory and vague? I have a picture in my mind of the lawn which always grew too long before Dad would go out and mow it on some Saturday, so that the neighbors never said anything because what could you say, that he didn't mow it frequently enough for you? Instead, Dad napped during the heat of a weekend afternoon, lying on the couch in the living room on his stomach, or on his side with one of Mom's throw-pillows under his head. He snored, so we knew where he was. Out in the sun near the front doors of the garage, which hung precariously on long triangular iron hinges, blacksmithed hinges made for the doors of a horse barn, or a carriage-house. One door missing, or rather not hanging in its spot, but stowed away inside the dusty old building where Dad never parked. The sunny grass, yellow in the glare, brilliant green everywhere else. This, I suspect, had to be a dream, not a memory. Or a dream of a memory. But the truth was still there, nevertheless, the bandage and the blindness.

The house itself was red - a special kind of red called Oxblood, framed in white at the corners, window frames, soffets and pillars. Originally, Dad taught us, the red paint was made with real blood from an ox. In any case, ours was called the red house - everyone in town knew the red house across from the public library. The yard was big - a big triangle about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre of land. There were four huge maple trees that lined the front at the street, split into pairs by the horse chestnut, with its odd finger-five leaf configuration and its Christmas-tree flowering in the spring, and the poky-green-husked smooth brown nuts, inedible, not much good for anything except throwing.

The tall grass was whatever grew in the yard. That is, no one planted anything special to enhance the beauty of our homestead. So in the front yard, there were patches of the softest, greenest carpets of angel-hair pasta like grass, beneath the lightning damaged maple tree in the side yard. This was a great place to play, with olive-green plastic toy soldiers or to carry out my little plastic box of die-cast cars - matchboxes and Corgis. It was a shady space, and cool in the summer, and after a rain it dried more quickly than other lawn places. The lightning strike, sometime before I was born, had

peeled a bit of the trunk away, and left a rotting step of the trunk about a foot deep and two feet wide. The wood slowly rotted back and this was a good place for cars to sit, or soldiers to defend. Carpenter ants, as long as the first joint of my index finger, lived around there and would give you a good nip if you weren't careful. They also made a fine animated and unpredictable enemy for toy soldiers. In this front yard play place I rarely lost cars or soldiers, even though I was inclined to leave things around and forget to return to fetch them. In the back yard, the lawn was thick and healthy, but spotted with rotted black-walnuts that dropped from the big shade-trees back there. This was a greater risk for small toys. When the "playroom" was added on to the house, there were two close hillocks of construction dirt that were never cleaned up, and they made terrific locations for automobile cities and war-zones, because we were allowed to dig in them like sandboxes. I lost many toys in that dirt. On the far side of the driveway, the grass grew so tall that it went to seed and would hide a full grown basset hound, if one chose to walk such a dog there.

There was one summer when Dad let a neighbor pasture their Shetland Pony in that deep growth. I don't know why we had a neighbor with a Shetland Pony - I think it might have been Mr. Williamson across the street, and he collected things as I was to learn later working with him - but it laid to rest that typical childhood dream of ownership. You see, a Shetland Pony craps small mountains, and then forgets where they are, kicking them around until the entire place is a mine-field for children with precious purchased once-a-season Chuck Taylor hi-tops. On the side of the garage was a compost pile, framed out with Belgian-block bricks, cut from granite, with two levels - wet compost and drier, almost-ready-to-spread-on-a-garden compost. At some point, the horse-plop was spaded up and thrown in the compost pile, as were all raked grass clippings and autumn leaves. Raking was as haphazard as mowing, though, because we children were not particularly motivated to do chores any more than Dad was. And because there was an insufficient peer pressure from the neighborhood, it was more likely that our house was superior for jumping in piles of leaves, playing soldier or losing matchbox cars in the deep grass, and finding excellent throwing weapons like soggy black walnuts or spiny horse-chestnuts to fling at enemies, or cars, or just idly across the street into the town public library parking lot. We didn't take throwing weapons too seriously in the beginning, or we probably would have used horse-plop.

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CAUTION

What a wonderful wonderful wonderful.

“Absolute Elation”

by Nicholas Scena

For a while my mother was overcome with happiness. Now she must wear sleeves over her arms. She has on a snug sweater that isn't exactly a turtleneck, but rather pulled up entirely too high. That without saying, the garment is two sizes too big and practically stretched all the way down to her knees. It's an ugly sweater, looks as if it were once covered in vomit, the dry crusty residue still intact. She's wearing quintessential gray sweats with random grease stains scattered all over them. The bags under her eyes insinuate sleep deprivation.

“So,” she says, lighting a cigarette. “How is...everything?”

“Everything is okay.”

She shakes her head lethargically, “No, no, nothing is okay....”

I put my chin to my chest and stare at the gleaming table-top.

She flicks her cigarette at the ashtray and smiles, bearing all

sticky yellowed teeth.

“With you, nothing is ever okay.”

I ignore her nagging and attempt to speak trivially, avoiding the reality of the situation. Mother grins and exhales smoke in my direction.

“Don't try to change the subject I know you're upset with me...and....”

I begin to wonder where I had gone wrong. If I had called her more often she'd have no time for the needle. If I told her I loved her, yearning for consolation would be nonexistent, on either sides of the spectrum. I think of what she used to look like, back when music was played on MTV. She'd dance about the living room, swaying her petite hips from side to side.

Moonstruck, I'd leap from wherever I happened to be seated and bring with me a grandiose embrace. My arms wrap around her torso and humming to the melody, we'd both spin in circles, a big mess of per-

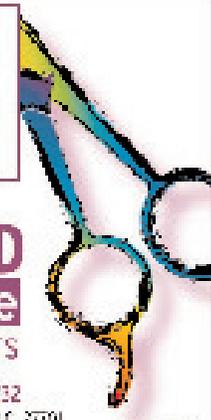
son, mother and son, twirling till dizziness severed us away from each other. On the ground, we'd look up at the ceiling fan. The green carpet below us, like grass, the white ceiling, a melancholic sky.

She hacks up a lung and speaks hoarsely, “Of course you are.”

I take a sip of Whales and sniffle. The wool scarf is snug around my neck, but I'm so cold. If only the tea were boiling. It'd open up my sinuses. Mother looks congested, she's pale and her jaw is twitching, of course a signal for something different, something worse. Mother needs a fix like I need her love. I wonder how she made it so far, away from her safe place. Even a child's endearment couldn't keep her away from the white horse. To think she was once the heroine amongst nostalgic unrest, those flashbacks that surface ever so often.

“Don't ignore me,” she spits.

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I shrug, and shake my head from side to side.

Mother lights another cigarette, "I'm sorry...truly."

"You lied to me," I retort inaudibly.

Suddenly she's sobbing, lips trembling, fingertips pressed against her temples.

"Sometimes...sometimes..."

"Sometimes what?"

"...Sometimes parents lie to their children. It was for your own good."

My mother slams her balled fists against the marble, "I'm sorry!" Her jaw is vibrating, black tears trickle down her white cheeks.

"I accept your apology." It is a mix between apathy and empathy; I really don't know where I stand. It is as if my feelings for my bearer are merely rocks protruding from the sea, guiding me to yet another grassy knoll.

I say it again, "I accept your apology."

She hides her face. I put a hand on one of her shoulders, but she pulls away. Everyone is watching.

Mother raises her head, lax and unfazed. "Well that's enough of that." I smudge the inky droplets with my complimentary napkin. She wipes away what's left behind. We take tissues from our pockets, and blow our schnozzles in unison.

I crumple up the garbage and toss it atop my empty plate. I wasn't going to eat any food, so tableware is useless. The sole meritorious item in my possession is a vest-pocket memo book I have been scribbling all over since I had gotten off the train. I purchased this little blue notepad at some diminutive shop just outside the station. I planned on writing my mother a letter, a deep and sentimental exploration of sappy hodgepodge. I know mother doesn't like that specific exhibition of affection. I subsided my actions and watched the pretty girls walk about the platform. I hadn't seen any of them on the train and was surprised to see so many depart without even acknowledging my presence.

My mother takes another sip of Earl Grey, a long, earsplit-

ting sip.

"How was the trip?" she asks.

"What trip?" I know exactly what she is talking about.

"The trip...down here." Her left eye twitches.

"Oh, it was...nice."

"It's good to be out of there." She lights another cigarette. She is referring to the Rehabilitation Center. She's been under care for what seems like a lifetime. I sit directly in front of her with my arms stretched out, palms facing upward. I want her to take my hands, but she doesn't get the hint, not completely. She pushes a scrunched up piece of paper against my open hand. I think it's a note, but I'm not entirely certain.



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“You know what”? she says rhetorically, “I’m scared.”

“What are you afraid of?” I inquire, half listening.

She stares out the window, breaking eye contact.

“Silence.”

Neither of us knows what to make of her grim comment.

“Open it,” Mother insists. She pushes my elbows towards my chest, bringing the note closer to my heart. I know it’s going to be a simple statement. She isn’t exactly a wordsmith. I know this is a sign that despair awaits. I’ve been trying to write a lamentation. I want to say some

parting words, but I can’t think of anything to say, not one thing. Death is ineffable. How can I sit here in front of the dying and try to think of something to say? Suddenly she’s standing up, and we embrace.

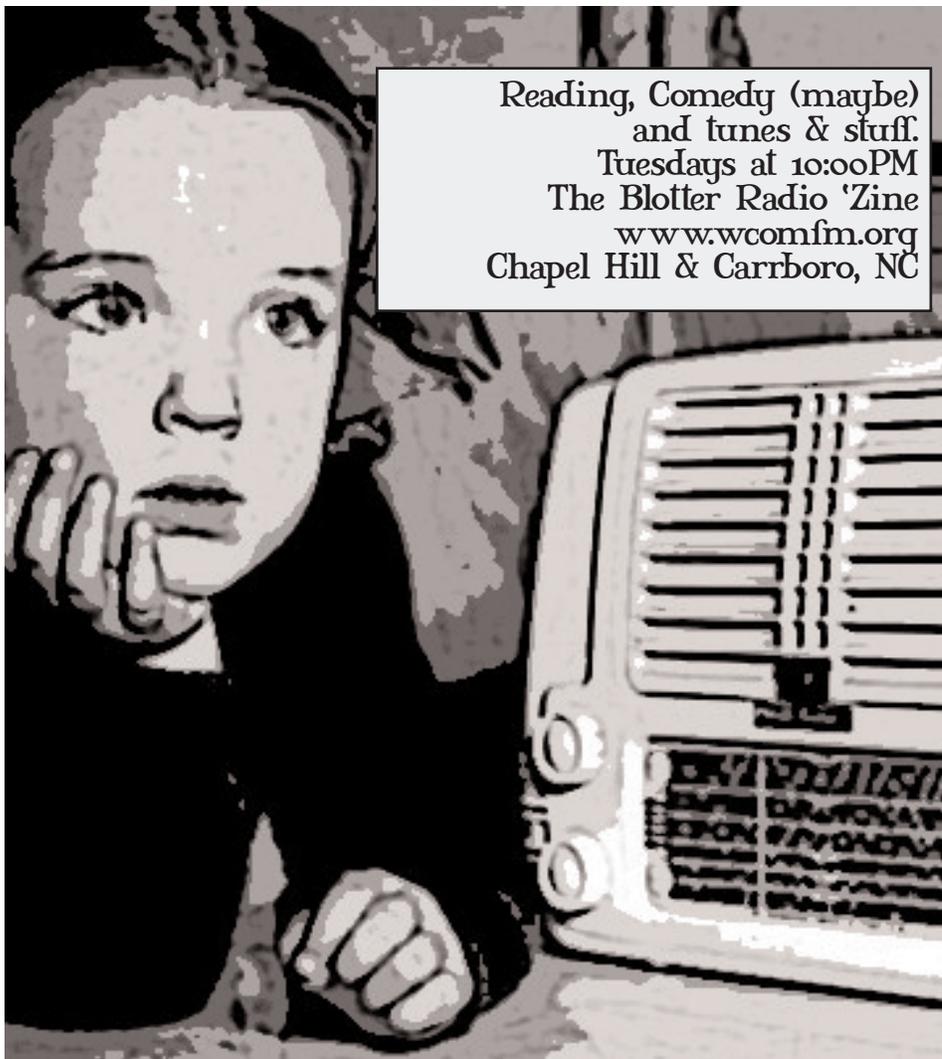
She’s weak and can barely stand, so I’m holding her up and her chin lie slack atop one of my bony shoulders. Her arms, full of poison, pulsating—our hearts beat the same rhythm. I feel a gust brush against my ear and realize it’s a whisper, and mother says to me, inaudibly, “I’m sorry...for everything.”

Tears stream down my face

and form a single droplet at the tip of my chin. I’m sweating profusely, and my arms are shaking. I tell her, “I don’t want you to die.”

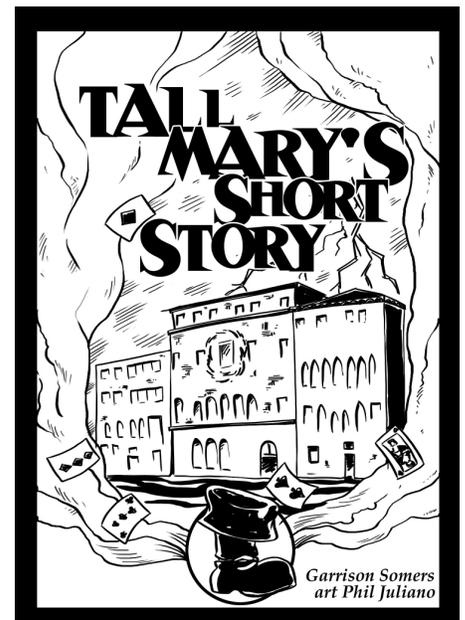
She starts laughing; it’s a sympathetic chuckle. She’s reached complete euphoria—absolute elation. She wants to die, and I can’t take that away from her, it’s inevitable. I know it’s not her fault, but she’s so easy to blame.

She sways hair out of my eyes and tells me I am handsome. The crumpled note rest in my palms, I put it in my front pocket, safe and sound, away from her, but attached to me. I wonder how much thought was actually put into the letter. I wonder if she’s saying her good-byes because she has to, something mandatory. I wonder if it’s a part of the program, another step towards salvation. I feel the



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audience watching, sobbing, and applauding when necessary.

“Be happy,” she tells me.

“I don’t want you to die.” I cast a hopeless expression. Our abysmal glances reflect one another. I think of the fifth grade, back when I was living with my grandparents and would visit either parent every other weekend.

My mother was rooming with an ill-mannered black man who was paying her to babysit his six-year-old daughter. Whenever I’d call her on the phone, her host would tell me she was working. I wasn’t ever allowed to visit, and one day I had shown up randomly.

I took a train, across states, from Delaware to Pennsylvania. I memorized the address and read street signs all over town until finally reaching my destination. The door swung open before I could grab the handle. The black man was hovering above me.

“E-excuse me m-mister.”

He spoke aggressively and

was looking back and forth.

Suspicion arose.

“What do you want kid?”

He thought the cops had sent me in, and wanted me off his property.

“What do you want?” he asked practically slamming the door on my foot.

“Is my mom here?”

Bewildered, he scanned my demeanor and knew I meant business.

I stood there with my hands behind my back, unaware of his sordid operations. He sensed my naiveté, the innocence before him radiating so intensely that he wanted to die right then and there.

“Come on in,” his limp arm gestured towards a raggedy old couch situated amongst rubble. His living room was full of trash, crunched up candy wrappers, broken bottles, and syringes sticking out of the carpet. My mother was lying face down on the floor, her arms sprawled above her head. Her hair was dyed blonde, and the

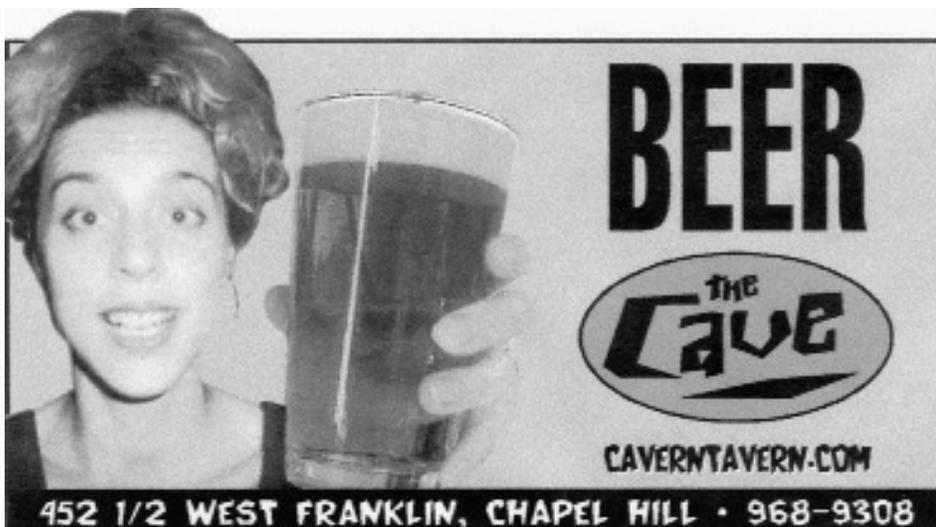
veins in her neck were pumping wildly. I asked if she was all right, and the black man told me she had a headache, and that was all. He offered me leftover macaroni and cheese. I poked my mother’s shoulder. She was unresponsive. The black man’s daughter approached me and wanted to know if I wanted to play with her. I said no. I was about four years her senior and was too distracted to even fantasize a little bit.

“I think you should go,” the black man said to me. On a visceral level, I understood, and slowly backed out of his home. He lived in a rundown apartment complex and knew the area wasn’t suitable for a small child, especially one of my stature. He didn’t offer me a ride, but slipped two dollars in my pocket. It wasn’t enough for a bus ticket.

So, now I sit, heading back from another unsatisfying visit, lips trembling, my fingers straightening the crumpled paper.

I run my index across the uneven ridges and begin to make out the words.

The letter reads, *Come again before the end.* ❖



“Do My Jekyll and Hyde Amuse You? or How Does One Become A ‘Literary Absurdist?’”

by Joe Buonfiglio

“I take offense at that,” I replied to her insinuation with an air of holy indignation. “What makes you think I play the clown?”

To my mind, there is a distinct difference to absurdist-based humor and clowning in the traditional sense of the profession. While it is true that at any given moment both may rely upon the arbitrary disarray whirling all about us, I can see that many of you may not appreciate the role the Literary Absurdist plays in the cosmic fart that is the universe.

So, I’m going to now take a moment here to step out of my

usual strange-humor persona to break the fourth wall and speak directly to you in a more professional fashion in order to offer up a little insight into my favorite subject matter ... ME.

How does one become a “Literary Absurdist,” an absurdist-humor writer? What dark forces of the universal landscape are at work there, eh?

Right out of the gate, you need to realize that I am a creature of Jekyll and Hyde Syndrome. (It’s a real condition. Google it, if you’re so inclined. I’m not your mommy; do your own homework.) I can be funny one second, and then turn on a dime with intense anger the next; jocular, and then for no obvious reason, turn hostile without

warning. This creates a natural irrationality to my existence and, as you might expect, easily translates to the absurdity within my chosen craft. It is a life generating a haphazard bedlam that reveals itself in my view of the world that consequentially emerges in my literary works.

My angels and my demons are one and the same, and my Muse cannot distinguish between the two. Darkness from light, light from dark; comedy from tragedy; tragedy becoming comedy.

Even as far back as high school, I felt split in two; as if I had a foot in each of two worlds, but I never fit into either ... never really felt comfortable ... never really accepted. So now, I create



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my own little world unto itself; a world where I fit in; a world where I ... *make sense*.

I see our ephemeral walk upon this Earth as both ridiculous and utterly meaningless outside of our own parochial perception of "self." Once you recognize this, even the horror cutting into us as we slide along our mortal coil has a humor to it. It's almost impossible not to see once you recognize life as an arcane vapor farted out of God's ass due to an overconsumption of His own self-importance.

However, what was placed into the primordial ooze of my soul that evolved into this obscene thing, a preposterous hyena now attempting to enlighten you as if you give a pretty penguin poop about any of it?

Let me explain.

Ever since a dear friend of mine introduced me to *Monty Python's Flying Circus* when I

was but a mere child in middle school, my love of the absurd — specifically absurd humor — has been my life's passion-project. (He also introduced me to The Rolling Stones' *Sympathy for the Devil*, but that's another part of the story for another day.) My vocational pursuits became this peculiar blend of the ribald bizarre with an underlying intelligentsia influence. I craved British television (particularly comedy and sci-fi); this melded with a fascination of artists such as Salvador Dali. I realized that the artistry of the Marx Brothers was not just lowbrow antics, but a magnificently timed dance with a wonderful intelligence behind it.

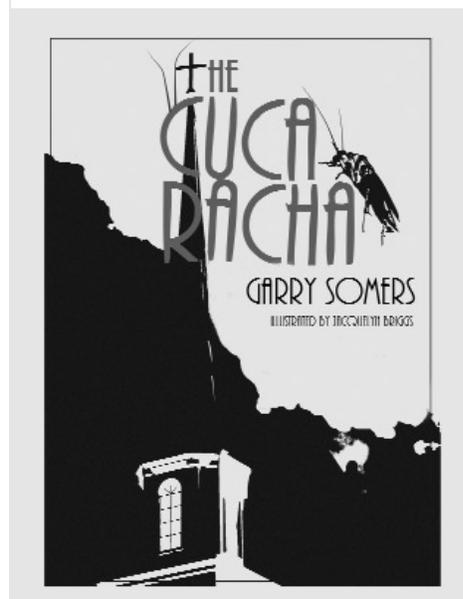
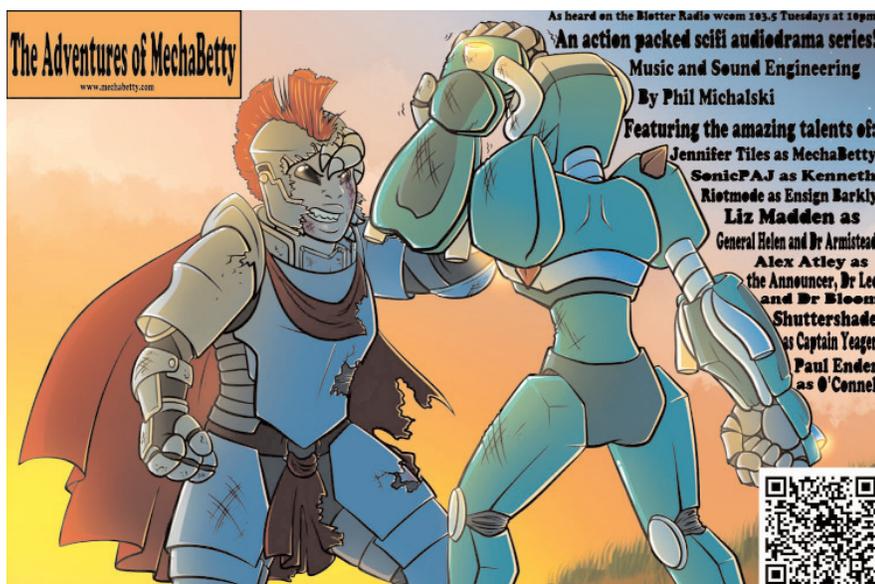
I am a creature of fantasy. I don't make sense in the "real" world. But in the realm of the blank page?

Not only do I fit in; I'M GOD! Nothing happens unless I will it to happen.

In the so-called real world, I'm just one more down-on-his-luck schmuck. In the worlds I create, I'm **Superman, Batman, Deadpool, Doctor Who** and **Lou Costello** all rolled into one brilliantly irrational package!

I remember, years ago, sitting on the old Warner Brothers' lot with reps from a production company interested in a screenplay I had co-written. At one point, we were sitting outside eating while pieces of various sets were walked by us as we casually discussed how Fox had fucked up a real opportunity when it took on the long-running BBC science-fiction television program *Doctor Who* back in the 90s. Everyone took all this nonsense completely seriously in this atmosphere of make-believe revolving all around us as if it had anything to do with any sort of grounding

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in reality.

It was completely absurd and delightfully humorous within its own little esoteric context of authenticity.

For that brief, shining moment, I felt alive.

I felt at home.

I felt as if—

... as if—

... as if I made sense.

God, there are times when I really miss LA.

Humor? That's my coping mechanism.... No, it's my defense mechanism.

Absurdism? That's just how I see the world, isn't it? The pointless confusion of the cosmos.

Yet, these seemingly incompatible forces (Shouldn't indiscriminate disorder cause distress, not

levity?) help me hold on to my sanity. Well, at least what passes for sanity for me. Here's a real-life example of what I'm talking about.

Not too long ago relative to the time of this writing, I pissed off the sponsor and co-producer of a local radio show by incessantly interrupting the dramatic reading during what was an integral part of the show's format with my trademark inane, irrelevant, *irreverent*, absurd commentary.

I mean to tell you, this guy was red-faced angry. I felt as if I was being chided by my first-grade teacher for engaging in class-clown activities that demolished the day's lesson. Now mind you, the reading was from *The Ox-Bow Incident*, so it was dry, tedious and most likely lulled listeners to sleep; "sleep," as in a welcoming overdose of sleeping pills to end the misery of having to go on.

However, in his defense, I did break with the program's sacrosanct format and I could see

where he may have felt I betrayed a sacred trust of the Theatre of the Mind or some such bullshit.

But afterwards, over a few beers with the show's co-hosts, I had to laugh. The producer/sponsor had no problem with the fact that I brought fresh-baked baguettes into the studio and, on-air, told them all to shove them up their asses while we all sang the national anthem of Canada. That was okay. But interrupt the reading of an outdated, boring piece of literature and I'm banned from the show for life.

You get what I mean now? Are you coming around to embracing the weirdness of the world?

Absurd.

Humor.

My sanctuary....

Oooooooooo Caaaaaaaana-daaaaa! ❖

Best In Show Comic

by Phil Juliano



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

Nostalgia or pain? That is the real question. I find myself slipping in my sleep towards memories of past...glory? No, just moments of idle, perhaps opportunistic, success. Not pride, not rational reflection, just dreamscapes from which I emerge with tears difficult to explain and a sense of gloom squatting by the door of despair.

I am told that dreams fade. I am told that memory does the same.

Of course, that's not what I want to hear. I want to feel - to believe - that there is a hard-drive in my skull that holds what I hold dear as dearly as I think I do, that is compartmentalizing and cross-filing every important moment of my life into easily accessed, recoverable files.

The answer is no.

I will, inevitably grow older or less alive and either way my memories, like my dreams, will evaporate steadily into nothing, leaving behind nothing. This being the case, like Frost I must choose between fire and ice. I favor pain over nostalgia, I suppose, because that I can do without.

But I will miss the tidbits of young love - the details that made it poignant and clear and sharp. I will miss knowing the name of the perfume that no longer is sold anywhere and the notes that assemble it into a time and place and picture and feeling in my mind. Perhaps there will be a day I am walking, in a park or along a street by a restaurant with window-boxes when the breeze will do that magic that breezes occasionally have and create that scent again, for no one but me to recognize and I will knuckle away a tear only I can explain.

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Three by Doug Mathewson

“Profile Test”

In Sunday’s newspaper there was a test or a quiz. It asked as if it were a bad thing) if you had become your father or someone else. There were several answers to choose from, but I do not remember what they were.

Never became my father, just look like him.

What I became was my uncles. All of them.

My mothers fire and drive, her odd sense of justice.

Her moral code that I live through the shuffled incarnations of my five uncles. Dead now, everyone one.

The larger than life wildcard, stories full of adventure, who vanished to the west.

The smart and quiet, the resentful one. Self exiled, distant in his anger.

The world traveler! A most accomplished man, who brought home nothing.

Stories he would spin with an elegant ease. So alone in his life.

The youngest one, the damaged fold. Handsome he died so young.

The self proclaimed hero. A bullshitter, so full of himself. People included or excluded from his ever evolving myth of self at whim.

I stumble through these five daily, like punch-cards shuffled machine quick.

Each with my mothers stubborn optimism, seen through my father’s gentle eyes.



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"Skill Sets"

Juan Carlos didn't grow up around here. He's from Guatemala so he knows a lot of stuff we don't. Stuff like how to keep a nectarine peel in one piece, turn it inside out and make a little nativity creche to hang on the tree. With a Sharpie he made a simple version of the scene inside. That's so cool!

I closed one eye peeked in to admire his work. There were little shepherds with their sheep, three wisemen with gifts, and a tiny manger. But my girlfriend was Mary and Juan Carlos was Joseph! That's not cool at all!

"The Muse"

I saw The Muse last night at the 24 hour corner store and she looked like shit. She was buying cigarettes and Slim Jims, I was getting cat food and a Slurpee. Poor thing, she had on an old bathrobe over her house coat, a bomber hat with ear flaps, and men's shoes.

Kid behind the counter told her she couldn't smoke in the store.

I said something. I said "don't say that", or "leave her the fuck alone" or "she's alright" or something. I don't know, but I said something.

She ground it out on the linoleum and paid.

On her way out she touched my arm and whispered

"I haven't forgotten you Bunny."

"What I Have To Offer"

I wrote a poem
for a woman
who didn't like poetry.

Result:
blank eyes staring at a moonless sky
with a drop of spittle
at the far reach of her mouth.

A better reaction actually
than the beach bunny
I tried to impress.

I handed her
a squished up piece of paper
of heartfelt verse
and not a little sand.

A big ugly heap of brown-green kelp
suddenly appeared at my feet.
I swear she dumped it there.

I no longer
write poems for women.

I offer them myself instead.

The main complaint seems to be
too much tell.
not enough show,
an overabundance of clichés.
mostly doggerel in human form.

I met many women
who didn't like poetry.
Sadly, they didn't stop there.

Two by John Gr

Grey

"The Cicadas"

Every thirteen years they emerge -
about as I often as Bert and me have sex
says Jessie.

According to the hook,
when it's time to mate,
males hang their tymbals.
and females flap their wings.

Well at least that means we're doing it right,
she adds.

CONTRIBUTORS:

Nicholas Scena is a hairstylist, aspiring writer and filmmaker. He's an appreciator of surrealistic arthouse cinema, transgressive literature, and claims to be a vinyl collector without a record player. Quite frankly, he refuses to truly consider himself an author until he produces work on a vintage typewriter in some bohemian hotel overlooking majestic, foreign lands.

"Writer & Literary Absurdist" **Joe Buonfiglio** loves penguins (quite literally) ... and cheese spread... often at the same time. Oh, and his best friend is a caramelized onion named Silvia. That's probably important to know about him. If you're weird enough to want to experience more of his locker-room intelligentsia laced with the tears of polite society, go to his Twitter page @JoeBuonfiglio (<https://twitter.com/joebunfiglio>) and his dark-humor Absurdist blog "Potpourri of the Damned" at <https://potpourriofthedamned.wordpress.com/> We now return you to the "Gardening with Toilet Duck" program.

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marty smith