

*What's on the bucket list with James Benjamin T. Byrom,
Evan James Seay, J. R. Solonche, Maureen Daniels, Teddy Stocking,
Phil Juliano, and The Dream Journal*

The Blotter

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“Focus”

Sometimes the clutter of living gets so deep and snarled that it entwines my path and I can't find the way through.

A sentence so fraught as that can mean only one thing: I have a touch of writer's block. It happens to every writer. OK, maybe it didn't affect Isaac Asimov, but the rest of us mortals stumble into that briar patch from time to time. For me, *the block* manifests itself in a way that is both insidious and ludicrous – the blank page presents so many options that I cannot focus. Friends - writers and not - tell me that this seems a very good problem to be faced with, but to me it doesn't seem so.

Here's how it works, or doesn't so much, depending on your point of view: I begin my day with a file open, a project ready to begin or continued. And I do - *I do* - type away like a busy little shoemaker's elf at the story, the essay, the chapter. But my brain doesn't play well with others. It runs ahead, faster than I can type. It stops staying focused on the sentences rolling off my fingers and throws out what it thinks is a funny punch line to a joke in a story that hasn't been written. A punch line that might work well with a different passel of characters in a different setting than the one I'm currently cobbling within.

Maybe what I get it is better named “writer's flu.”

Of course what I need to do is *keep going*, bulldog my way past the compelling, competitive creative noise. What I do, however, is stop, find my composition book – the one with the well-worn cover and the pencil lodged between the leaves, and open it to a blank spot on a page, take the pencil and scribble down the thought. Then I try to find the context that it needs so that when I return to that page, I'm not baffled as to why I wrote down the words “disaster means bad star,” or “*imposter complex* is what all students suffer at Harvard.” And, no, I don't have magic fingers that can write in italics. I must put big swirling circles around the key words so that I will see them at some point later – when I don't have a clue. If I'm feeling peculiarly lucid, I will date my notes – 10/03/17 – because, why not? Archivists at some vague point in the future will want to know when I lost my mind, right? (Probably not.) A more curious person might ask why I don't keep my notes in order, or why I don't keep them online, or at least in a Word file.

And the answer is I don't know.

Occasionally the new idea decides that it takes precedence over everything; that morning's task, any errands I must run, how well I plan that evening's supper for the girls. It doesn't become a “rabbit-hole,” per se, but something closely related to that family. Certainly the new idea has

no business thinking this, but that doesn't seem to matter. A new idea is sometimes impertinent; imagines itself precocious, in the classic sense of that term – the young one who imagines itself mature. And so I sit and fiddle with the words, like someone digging post holes for the fence they haven't even drawn a picture of for the spouse to see and agree to, stirring the paint for the first coat, buying work-out clothes on January 2nd. I find myself performing all sorts of out-of-order (and mixed-metaphorical) tasks. When I again look up half the day is gone, the sun is past the yardarm. Then I get angry with the new idea, as if it were a puppy that piddled on the Sunday *Times* before I had a chance to pull out the crossword puzzle.

All of which helps not a whit. The new idea is also selfish. If you don't pay it its due, it spins in circles, now a full-grown dog that can't figure out which direction to lie in to sleep. It rolls around in my head like the marbles in the ceiling in Mr. Roberts. Only they're really there, not like Ensign Pulver's idle promises.

Damn it. See what I mean? Off the rails again. I want to get to work on a writing task, and stay on that task, until it is finished. I want to work through plot problems, polish my prose, create something...elegant. And then I want someone to read it.

Not just anyone, mind. I want my father to read what I write. Dad was my guy, my go-to audience, to see if my funny works, my adventure is breathtakingly real, my sorrow...sorrowful. Was what I was done with ready, reliable, readable. Dad was the person for whom I've been writing, all these years. He could tell me what worked, what he didn't like (curse words put him off a little – he would tell me that I should try harder to find the...creative phrases that could take their place). A lot of folks won't believe this – they cannot imagine a relationship between father and son that isn't tragically confrontational or broken. I was lucky in that regard, even though I don't believe in luck. Things are what you make them, he would say; what you let them become, through action or inaction. He didn't always like what I wrote, but my dad liked that I write. He liked baseball, wine, fishing, singing in the choir, doing crossword puzzles, eating peaches and reading.

And so it is no coincidence that I've been in a bit of a tailspin (talespin?) for a year and change, because that's how long it's been since Dad passed. You couldn't ask for a better reader, he was full of enthusiasm and commentary. All writers suffer from writer's block occasionally. I'm not sure how many suffer from readers' block. But he would say, "get back to work," and so I do.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

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CAUTION

Take nothing for granted.

“A Game of Worlds”

by James Benjamin T. Byrom

One day Brrrt (pronounced with a significant rolling of the “r”) challenged PoMo (spoken as you might easily suspect) to a game that roughly translates into “A Game of Worlds.” It was played out in real time by each opponent’s interstellar fleet, as each were the feudal sovereigns of their distant regions of the universe; able to make contact by telecommunication methods that defy the laws of sound and frequency. They had long since discovered the universe was mostly empty and therefore could be manipulated with their shared levels of technological advancement.

The ensuing game picked sectors of space divided into a grid of many quadrants which would be occupied or challenged for ownership of in rotation. Quadrants were analyzed for

areas of habitation and quality of colonization since the fleets required maintaining as well as the fueling of energy and food supply for the crews. A single game could take eons (500,000,000 years) as their avatars affected native galaxies, planets’ orbital trajectories and creating sun stars while extinguishing others to suit their own climate and industrial needs.

Distinguished fleet vessels that affected the tide of winning or losing were allowed to travel through the quadrants in certain designated patterns per the pre-agreed upon rules. The objective, naturally, to seek out opposing occupied quadrants and destroy the distinguished vessel and any civilization present as a bonus until one whole team was obliterated. If an occupied quadrant was found

with the opposing player’s key vessel itself no longer occupying it, 2 options were possible: convert industrialized resources for their particular needs, or destroy the enemy resources and continue on their way so opposing forces could not easily return and resume operations.

Rarely, but with enough regularity to warrant a set of sub-rules, a sector would be selected where a quadrant contained some semblance of native life form organisms that could be bred and engineered into a serving race and allow the players’ avatars to allocate their physical selves to other occupancies in the grand scheme of the game. These serving organisms were as strong and intelligent as their resource production required, creating a wide array of organisms ranging from practically mindless to actually quite intelligent.

In this instance if a developed native life form was found in a previously occupied quadrant, whichever player’s turn it was could: re-train simple organisms, re-breed or even cross-

Friendship, loyalty, nostalgia; and the joy and healing power of music...

A Southern college town and its thriving local music scene, where the music’s neither “sacred” nor “profane” so long as it’s good...

A lost tape of a beloved band’s legendary show...

A record label, poised to break big, which certain people want to be part of - by any means necessary...

Two visitors, whose own music has been muted by regrets over long-ago bad decisions: Chuck McDonough, former grad student, who skipped town after learning things about himself he couldn’t face; and Penny Froward, whose attempt to help a friend in danger almost destroyed another woman’s life...

A mysterious will by an unknown hand; and murder...

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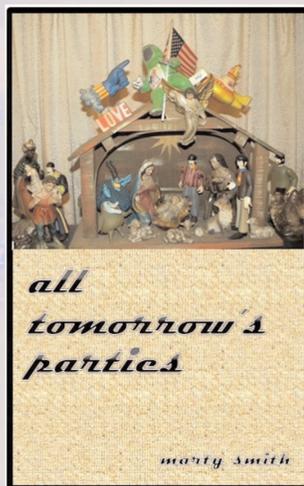
All Tomorrow’s Parties

by Marty Smith



(publisher & book reviewer, “The Blotter Magazine;” contributor to the “Urban Hiker;” former host of “New Frontiers” and “Laugh Tracks” on WXDU - FM, Duke University Radio)

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breed with them for genetic attributes, or colonize another planetary region within that same quadrant (if possible based on a random assortment of single or multi sun star solar systems and habitable planets and native life forms available) and set them on their own path to war with the opposing player's civilizations.

It is in this manner that Earth was colonized and engineered to evolve humans from cave men to the modern man with ever advancing technology and a yearning to conquer the stars. Not knowing we are a forgotten remnant of a game long since played and never knowing the victor (or if Brrrt and PoMo were their real names) and as such always bound to wonder where we came from and what our purpose is but still ever drawn to conflict and exploration and innovation in equal measure.

Through some genetic memory an oversimplified version of their great galactic game still exists and endures in our civilization as the king of strategy games and players fervently challenge each other in championship events held around the world (and many other worlds). We call it Chess. ❖

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

I miss the beach house, the one with the bedroom downstairs whose mattress was so lumpy that trying to make love with him was an exercise in frustration. We kept having to put one leg each out behind us as if holding our place on a hillside we were climbing. But it didn't dampen our passion, nothing does when you're newly discovering someone else. There's that sense of wonder and curiosity and giggly goggle-eyed silliness that takes place when two people take their clothes off and look at each other. He was tall and skinny as a nerdy teenager, and liked my thighs - my worst thing. And we talked about all sorts of stuff, like the Monet water-lilies poster tacked to the bedroom wall. It must have been covering a stain or hole or something. I promised that we would go to MOMA and see the real things and he was enthusiastic about going with me. We did go, later, when the weather went fall on us - ate sandwiches on the benches and just stared at the paintings until the docent whispered that we weren't supposed to eat in the museum. And the beach house! It smelled like salt and old wood and breakfast dishes and spilled wine. A good combination of olfactory mnemonic devices.

EmCee - cyberspace



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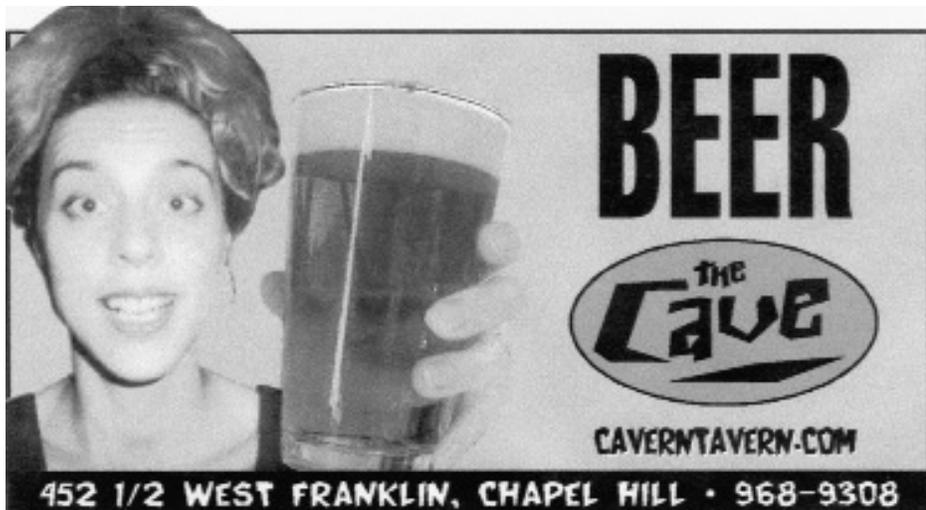
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"For the Girl at the End of the Bar"

by Evan James Seay

At the end of the bar you laughed and shook your head
I couldn't make out your words but I followed your lips
Red as the number 3 sliding into a faux leather pocket
Smoke drifting off your tongue and mingling in the air
Rising and falling and finally drifting away but I still watched
You caught my eye and I looked to my left to anything
There's a picture on the wall behind the bar, a man
He's holding a trophy fish as big as the boy next to him
Couldn't be more than 8 years or maybe 10 I can't tell
The black and grey photo hiding both of their smiles
Barely making out their pride as the scale edged forward
Pointing toward a three digit figure bigger than anything

You weren't looking a sigh shook me from my stomach
God you were beautiful I couldn't help but stare
Your dress draped on your shoulders like I wanted to be
Hanging on like you're the last good thing on earth
Begging for a kiss or a touch or I'd settle for a glance
The deep navy blue reflecting the fluorescent bar lights
A sheen which made you look like you were an ocean
The moon just barely touching a wave as it passes
A hint of the mysterious beauty that lay hidden beneath
Your legs were crossed on the barstool one foot tapping
The rhythm of the band but I hoped it was your heartbeat
I hoped because I saw you and I started tapping along



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Again you looked my way but this time I smiled
A hint of a smirk twitched at the edge of your lip
I looked down at the bar and examined my napkin
Took a gulp of my beer and called for another round
This time I didn't look up for what felt like an hour
When I looked again your friend had left you at the bar
I looked on the dance floor but I couldn't see him
Maybe I should get up and glance through the window
No you'd see me and I'd look like more of an idiot
Sitting alone makes you think crazy things you know
Especially when you're thinking of someone
But still you're stuck at the end drinking alone

You were getting up to leave and I'll admit I panicked
I had been admiring you all night I couldn't let you go
The barman took your cash and you turned away
Here's my chance
Excuse me ma'am I've watched you all night
You look stunning if I you don't mind me saying
Have a nice night and finally I could breathe
You gave me another one of those crooked grins
Looked at me like you could see into my soul
Thank you sir a wink a gentle touch a parting nod
Have a good night ma'am and you opened the door
Swallowed by the dark, I watched as you left

"On the Doorstep As You Are Leaving"

I don't want
To talk about it
I shouldn't
Have to explain
My actions
Speak for themselves
You just want
To lay the blame

Two more by Evan James Seay

"For the Two of Us"

I need a loaf of French bread
Sara's coming over tonight

I'll get some ribbon noodles
And I need some marinara

She'll enjoy some cheese
Which kind does she like?

There's a sale on cake mix
I need more milk for that

I bet she'd like ice cream
After we've had our meal

Canned cherries, the juice
Dripping from our spoons

A candle and some matches
To light what the moon will miss

And a wicker chair for the porch
Big enough for the two of us

"Who gave these idiots
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“Patriotism”

by J. R. Solonche

I don't own an American flag.
I never have.

I grew up in an apartment building in the Bronx.
Nobody owned a flag.

Now that I live on a road in the country,
all my neighbors fly the flag.

Except one.
Like them, he does have a flagpole

with a flag hanging on it
in front of his house.

But he says he isn't flying it.
He says he's lynching it.

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"Cartography of the Body in Love"

Wherever in this city horses walk
I, too, have walked with your
delicious and seditious tendencies,
your secrets chalked on my mind's wall.

Your hand, so much larger
than my own, pressed to mine,
aligning our palmistry.

This moment belongs to us,
how we delve inside fantasies.
But I cannot have you, nor will I
ever have you, because my body,
an irreparable, although clever
surgical mastery remains broken.
I would feel nothing if you were
to touch these scars, their stuffing.

Three by Maureen Daniels

The Pregnant Mare
or

The Guys
in The Crate
at The Joint



Garrison Somers

art by Susan Connors

On Amazon - of course....

www.blotterrag.com

"Long Distance Call"

You left me with the scent of walnuts
in tree branches so high even the cats
could not reach them. Someday,
I'll swoon from love words
the shape of your front yard trees.
Heartwood. Acacia. Tamarack.
The syllabic boughs of your name.

It is snowing here in New York City.
In my warm, windowless kitchen, I brew
coffee and wonder if you think of me at all.
My ears still tingling from the sounds
your voice makes, your rich, unavailable joys.

"Seth's Pond, Martha's Vineyard"

The sand splashed road curves
around the handmade wooden fence,
bright with beach towels
threaded through the bleached,
splintering, slats. Earfuls of children's
laughter beneath the single cloud
that roams over the island.
A small plane roars a flock of black
birds from out of the circle of trees
where the sunlight is beginning
to fade behind the moon's skeleton.

“Kelly Drive”

Evening lights on Boathouse Row
Correspond in ripples on the Schuylkill
We stood in between

Brushing hands
Tangled in my overcoat
You kissed my cheek

Snowfog swirled at stoplights
Like rose colored globes
Wrapped up in crimson

I told myself I love you

Three by Teddy Stocking

“Dog Days for Lazy Lovers”

Tiptoeed creaks undiscovered
Foreign quarters, courters chores
Papered walls and parquet floors

“Docent and Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights”

She stands as if she does not know
the eight spotlights
were intended to shine upon her

Blond hair made gold from their light
A delicate voice slips from her tongue
treading lightly on wobbly words
reverberating up the ceilings of the hall
piercing through her patrons

as if to reach me
I watch her hoping to get closer
but she is far out of view of the spotlights
now refocused on the trademark
the crowd rushes towards the next room

I am left, staring at the large trademark with eight spotlights

Best in Show by Phil Juliano



“Coming Clean” – a call for submissions.

Here’s the idea – we at The Blotter Magazine want to see your soul redeemed. Or something like that. How? By truth-telling, letting the old cat out of the bag.

Spilling the beans, if you will permit the chestnut.

Gun to the head: we think that there’s something entertaining in revealing your innermost secret (wow, what a Pandora’s box this may open...): the one you’ve kept locked tightly and even considered once and for all finally throwing away the key to (note to self – that is one mangled sentence).

Are we even in the vicinity of on target? You betcha. So we want to make it a regular feature.

What sort of truths are we looking for? Well, we’re going to start the honesty right here: what we don’t want is a story about your secret affair – not because we don’t like sex, but because it’s way too easy. And we think you’ll probably lie about it. Sex stories are all measurements and moisture, anyway. (And the fact is it’s not a secret, Sparky...because if it’s true you weren’t alone and for better or worse they’ve already told someone else and then *they’ve* told someone and, well - wow – nobody wants to discuss the math after that.)

Instead we’d like to know about that mistake you’ve made in your life – the one little, influential goof that you imagined at the time was enormous, and left you in awe of the complexity of causality and correlation, and so you kept it all under your hat to this very day. Maybe it really was enormous – a saga with terrible implications and repercussions and you’re terrified to tell anyone you know about it, but you’ve just got to get it off your chest and move on with your life.

Consider us your reasonably private confessional.

Write it down, send it in. Try and stay around 250 words – frankly that’s about all we can handle of your sordid past, you crazy mixed up kids. Will there be prizes? Maybe, I don’t know, down the road, if this thing gains traction, we’ll see. Don’t know how to tell such a story very well? Not to worry – we have editors a-plenty here to give your yarn a professional polishing. See how nice and neat this “call for submissions” is? We will work it for you, too.

So tell on yourself. What sort of thing did *you* do in your “yoot” that needs an act of contrite revelation to a discreet group of like-minded individuals? What storytelling might very well save your mortal soul?

Send it to mermaid@blotterrag.com. Sympathetic readers are waiting for your tale of woe.

CONTRIBUTORS:

James Benjamin T. Byrom has a BA in Ethnomusicology, a minor in Music Theory + Composition and a double minor in Vocal Performance. He's the voice of The Dapper Conspiracy, a Prohibition/Country-Western influenced Rock band from Raleigh, NC and a Scholastic Gold Key winning Graphic Artist. He's had a respectable number of stories, poems and art published over the years (including The Blotter!) but to his Kindermusik and Phonics students at the preschool learning center where his own 3 children attend, he's simply Mr. Ben (or Daddy). Follow his art on Instagram (@LigneClarity) and hear his band at www.TheDapperConspiracy.com

Evan James Seay writes, "I'm a freshman at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington currently pursuing a BFA in Creative Writing. I'm originally from Southwest Virginia, but moved to the North Carolina coast two years ago for the weather. I've self-published an online newsletter that I kept running for six years until I was forced to retire it in April of 2016."

J. R. Solonche has been publishing in magazines, journals, and anthologies since the early 70s. He is author of *Beautiful Day* (Deerbrook Editions), *Won't Be Long* (Deerbrook Editions), *Heart's Content* (Five Oaks Press), *Invisible* (nominated for the Pulitzer Prize by Five Oaks Press), *The Black Birch* (Kelsay Books), *I, Emily Dickinson & Other Found Poems* (forthcoming from Deerbrook Editions), *In Short Order* (forthcoming from Kelsay Books), and coauthor of *Peach Girl: Poems for a Chinese Daughter* (Grayson Books). He lives in New York's Hudson Valley.

Maureen Daniels teaches English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, where she is also a doctoral fellow in creative writing. She is an editorial assistant for *Prairie Schooner* and *Western American Literature*. Her work has recently been published in *Sinister Wisdom*, *Neologism Poetry Journal*, *Gertrude Press*, *Third Wednesday* and the *South Florida Poetry Review*.

Teddy Stocking is a graduate student at the University of North Carolina and discovered *The Blotter* one Sunday night at He's Not Karaoke hosted by D-Train. Before North Carolina, he studied at Wheaton College. He should be doing homework but he writes poems instead.

Phil Juliano of Bloomington, MN, just informed us via Facebook that Spence the dog is now 14. Happy Birthday Spence!!! Follow Peej and Spence on philjulianoillustration.com and purchase their new book at <http://bestinshowcomics.bigcartel.com/>.



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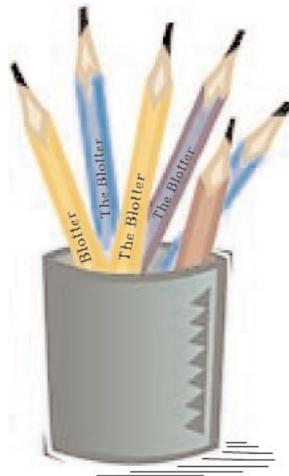
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