

The Blotter

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The Blotter

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COVER: “Shooting Stars” by
Joseph Miller - more inside

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“Don’t Just Do Something, Sit there!”

Someone once wisely said it will get worse before it gets worse. They meant it to be funny, that kind of offhand snark that passes for humor in a time when little is actually laughable and so fewer and fewer of us are laughing. It feels more intrusive of late. Or something of a jinx – the saying of which makes things actually happen. Or, if you don’t believe in such hoo-doo, it is a secret truth each of us harbors because we think about it so often that we’re tired of it, and are afraid everyone else is, too.

But they may be right. It – however you choose to define that word – may get uglier. Unfortunately, you may experience more of whatever it is that is not good. In fact, that is the whole theme behind the book of Revelation in the Bible. That things feel bad because they are bad. You are in pain, we are in pain, trouble, turmoil, a dire situation. Don’t worry, it will get worse. Still, there is another side to the path each of us is on.

Stay with me on this.

I’m no theologian, no pastor nor priest, not a prophet and not a psychologist. Not a teacher. I don’t know how to heal or help, and that’s really not the point of this space I give myself each month. I barely have suggestions: Take a deep breath. Go for a walk. Try a different path. Be in the moment.

But they’re good suggestions. Take a breath. A deep one. Four beats on the inhale, four holding, four on the exhale and four empty. Again. Once more.

Put on your shoes and go for a walk. Open a book and go for a walk. Put on some music and go for a walk. Sit somewhere quiet, after going for a walk.

Going for a walk? Try a different path. As someone wisely said, when you come to a fork in the road, take it. You do have choices. Don't feed that hungry, angry, frustrated wolf, no matter how it manifests itself.

All of which is easier said than done. Define that how you will.

Although the thing itself is based on an amateur study of behavior types by two women during the 30's and 40's, the familiar but pseudo-scientific Myers-Briggs personality profiles model has been found to have some redeeming qualities for learning about ourselves. One thing I gleaned from it that I think makes sense is that while we have distinct personality traits – introvert, extrovert, feeling and thinking - they are not rules that bind us. Just ruts we may be caught in. When those ruts work for us (and there's a strange beginning to a sentence) well, terrific. But when they don't, they're just ruts. We each have the capacity to climb out of them and find a new way. Turn away from frustration. Discern boundaries for yourself and hold to them. Push the envelope whenever you can. Don't depend on your own brute force, either. If help is offered, accept it. That very act of accepting help might be assisting someone else trying to climb out of their own rut.

Wield Occam's razor – The simplest explanation is usually the best one (or the right one). I have always interpreted this to mean when all else fails to fit, what is left is probably (although not absolutely) right. I use this for many of my decisions in life. I often appear to be a procrastinator, therefore, because sometimes the answer is no, and sometimes the answer is to do nothing. Which infuriates those who think actions speak louder than words.

Be intentional – When you go upstairs, hold the railing. When buying someone a gift, think about

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in the Great State of Georgia!



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CAUTION

really just a shadow of

continued on page 15

“Would You Like to Learn More?”

by Zary Fekete

He worked for the Language Institute as a language tester in the time after all languages had been uploaded. This was an era when people traveled from one side of the globe to another in a few hours using the pneumatic quantum train, a transport that flew through the subterranean tunnels threading through the earth's core, cutting the journey from New York to Tokyo down to three hours. People no longer learned each other's languages. Instead, they applied a software system to their mouth and ear pieces which automatically translated their words into the language that the other spoke.

The man's job was to test the currents of the new language systems. While several hundred languages had already been uploaded, there were new variants constantly being discovered and each one needed testing on human volunteers. Whenever a new language was uploaded there were a few glitches along the way. His job was to try the system and to make sure the new languages were smoothed out. Then the new language was released to the world.

The man arrived to the Institute and walked up the four flights to his office. His computer was waiting, dark and silent on his desk. After turning it on and running through the few setup steps he looked into his assign-

ments for that day. There was a new language waiting to be tested. He put the new language into the interface and waited for a volunteer to be found.

A moment later a man's face appeared before him on his screen. The two men smiled and waved to each other. Then the language tester spoke a few words into the microphone. The man in the screen responded. There were a few words in his sentences that were blanks, moments of silence. Whenever this happened the language tester made a note and asked the man on the screen to repeat the silent word. The system corrected the moments of silence and after about fifteen minutes the two men were talking together fluidly with no silences in their sentences.

The language tester thanked the man on the screen and they logged off. He language tester wrote up a report. The institute still asked for reports to be written on paper. This allowed for a digital and a physical record. The software programs contained all the information in the pages, but the pages were still written and collected into storage rooms in the basement of the institute.

When the language tester was finished writing his report, he walked back down the four flights and walked down two addition-

al flights into the basement where the storage facility was located. He turned in the paper and was about to walk back up to his office when he saw a small door next to the stairs. He had never noticed this door before because it had been behind some crates of papers. Today the crates were pushed aside and the door was there. It was a simple wooden door, different from the metal pneumatic doors from the upper floors of the school.

The man walked up to the door. There was

no sign on it. He reached out his hand and placed it against the wood. The wood felt warm to his touch. He looked down at the door knob. It was made of tarnished metal. He looked around and when he saw that no one was watching him, he reached down and turned the knob. It turned smoothly. He pulled the door open and looked inside.

Behind the door was another flight of steps. The steps were lit with a few simple light bulbs. The steps went down one flight and then turned to the right. The man walked



After II by Joseph Miller

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down slowly and looked to the right. The steps continued down. Without thinking about why he was doing this, the man continued.

He walked down several flights. The footsteps echoed lightly as he walked down. Every time he turned a corner to the right there were more steps. The man continued down for a long time. Eventually he lost track of how many flights of stairs he had walked. And then, there was another door before him. It was also made of wood and had a similar tarnished door knob. The man turned the knob and opened the door.

He saw before him a large underground room. There were squares on the floor, large tiles. The tiles were different shades of grey. People were walking from one tile to the next. They walked in pairs, softly talking together. There was a quiet murmur of conversation that filled the large room. The man stepped into the large room, onto the first tile. The tile depressed slightly below his step as though it were a huge, square keyboard key. The man tried to walk farther into the room, but he was not able to leave the first square. His legs would not permit him to walk any farther. He was about to turn back to the door behind him, when he noticed another man in the large room. This man was walking toward him. He was wearing a black jacket with a white shirt.

The man in the black jacket reached him. He was smiling.

“What is this place?” the language tester

asked.

The man in the black jacket looked pointed to his ear and motioned for the language tester to speak again. “This place,” the language tester said. “Where am I?”

The man in the black jacket took out a small card from his pocket. It was written in English. It said, “What words in Spanish do you know?” The language tester searched through his thoughts. Then he said, “Buenos dias.”

The man in the black jacket nodded and said, “Buenos dias.” He gestured behind him at the large room and then said, “¿Estás interesado en aprender más?”

The language tester frowned and said, “I don’t understand.”

The man in the black jacket took out another card and handed it over. The card said, “Would you like to learn more?” The language tester nodded.

The man in the black jacket prompted with his hand and said, “Quiero aprender más” and then he held up another card that said, “I want to learn more.” Then he repeated, “Quiero aprender más.”

The language tester nodded and slowly repeated, “Quiero aprender más.” The man in the black jacket helped him to say it a few more times, each time more clearly. Then, when the sentence was clear between them, the man in the black jacket gestured forward and the language tester realized he was able to step off of the first square. He walked a few feet and then could walk no

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farther. He looked at the man in the black jacket.

The man in the black jacket handed over another card. It said, "This is a slower way. And you cannot do it alone. Bring with you the words you know. We will share."

Slowly a smile formed across the face of the language tester. He clasped the hands of the man and said, "Thank you!"

The man in the black jacket smiled and gently shook his head. He said, "Gracias." And prompted the first man to repeat it. The language tester said, "Gracias." The two men slowly walked forward together into the large room. ❖



Cherish by Joseph A. Miller



Crossing II by Joseph A. Miller

“Hypothetical”

by James C. Clar

“The theme of fantastic fiction ... is the contamination of reality by dream.”

- Borges

Hypothetically speaking, let us imagine that, in the early years of World War II, the Empire of the Rising Sun engaged in a relentless campaign of aggression throughout the Pacific in order to secure its access to oil and other raw materials. As an integral part of their efforts to gain an edge over their enemies, the Japanese military sought to crack the codes used by the Allied forces. The Japanese, of course, were not alone in their desire to unlock the secrets of their enemies’ covert communication. What set them apart, perhaps, were the seemingly bizarre lengths to which they went to accomplish this goal. According to some sources, they even launched a campaign to seize as many materials published in English as possible with the thought that they might contain encrypted messages. Oddly enough, this also included books and articles on the game of chess.

Picture now a group of Allied prisoners of war being held in a Japanese internment camp in, maybe, the Philippines. The prisoners have been forced to surrender their chess magazines and materials. Those items were of great value to the men detained there. They allowed

them to escape, at least mentally, from the heat, deprivation, and brutality as they studied and replayed the games contained in those ordinary printed materials.

The Japanese officers overseeing the camp were convinced that those publications held secret codes and ciphers that were being used to pass messages to Allied High Command. The Japanese pored over the pages looking for evidence which might indicate the presence of hidden meanings. They searched for patterns and symbols that might be a clue to the existence of some secret communicate.

Assume, at least for now, that the Japanese officials found nothing of the sort. Chess magazines and game summaries, or so it turned out, were simply what they were purported to be. They were also written in plain language. Ordinary chess notation notwithstanding, the matter confiscated was wholly devoid of secret codes, messages, or meanings.

Let us now speculate, human nature being what it is, that the Japanese officers in that camp were still not satisfied. They continued to study the materials confiscated from the prisoners, convinced that there must be something they were missing. They tried all the tricks in, well, the book – different methods of decryption,

frequency analysis and substitution ciphers. They found nothing. Some of the officers even began to doubt their own training and abilities, wondering if they were neglecting something simple, something which their enemies had already figured out.

In the end, and in a grand gesture of anger and frustration, they kindled a large fire in the center of the camp and incinerated the materials they had amassed. The prisoners were required to watch the conflagration.

Let us add to this fantasy an ironic twist. For the sake of argument, we will assert that the Japanese suspicion that chess notation could be used to hide military codes was not, after all, entirely unfounded. We might, for example, postulate the existence of an Allied spy stationed in a place like Buenos Aires who was posing as a journalist. It seems that as early as 1939, while covering the 8th Chess Olympiad, this individual used chess notation in the stories he (or she) filed on the tournament to send important messages of a military and political nature back to London.

Let us go further and suggest that this individual continued this practice through other postings and in other world capitals. At some point in his (or her) unheralded career, our spy was able, again by means of a news report about another chess match*, to send a report predicting a surprise Japanese attack on American forces in the Pacific.

It is at this point where fact and fiction

blur ever more imperceptibly in our narrative. One can imagine several scenarios. For example:

1. The message was intercepted or otherwise never received.
2. The message was decrypted in London and deemed not credible and was thus never forwarded to the “cousins” in Washington.
3. The message, decrypted in London, was indeed forwarded to Washington where it ...
 - a. was ignored.
 - b. was buried in the machinations of the American war bureaucracy or perhaps downplayed for reasons of a political nature by a party or parties unknown.

The permutations are as numerous as the possible moves in a chess game.

If such a tale were ever to be written about such a spy, the ultimate irony would be that the very thing the Japanese military leadership suspected (and then rejected) as a cover for a military code turned out to be exactly that. The chess ephemera confiscated from those allied soldiers in the Philippines were innocent enough, but the system of chess notation itself had been co-opted ingeniously as a clandestine means of communication. What’s more, those Japanese officers in the Philippines were searching *ex post facto* for a message which had already been sent.

May we also postulate that, since the intrepid spy’s message was not acted upon, he (or she) went to his (or her) death

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– however that death occurred— without ever knowing if his (or her) fateful message was received and/or understood. One might hope that our hypothetical agent lived long enough to witness the end of a war that, ultimately, and no matter what part he (or she) played, was won by the Allies.

**Purely for the sake of verisimilitude*, let's assume that the game used by our spy to generate his (or her) fateful message was Euwe vs. Keres, Round 9, Amsterdam 1940.

Finally, the message, if such a message were ever sent: AAEI LDFP FPOA ITAI OCFO OFAL EAFM LLEL SRPC ODLI FOAI FMAF AALE EIOI FELM LLLD KAFE FELD IAIA EEEI FOLI.

Those wishing to try their hand at decryption should recall what system of chess notation predominated in the 1930's and 1940's. Note also that transcriptions of that game are not uniformly accurate ... unless they are! ❖



Compound by Joseph A. Miller

"Read it, or Don't"

book reviews by Mary Fallon

Horse, by Geraldine Brooks

My doctor reads books. At my first appointment with him years ago, while waiting in the little room, I was reading *Memoirs From An Antproof Case* by Mark Helprin. I was a little annoyed that he was interrupting me, and said so. When I asked him if he read books, his reply was, "Since I was about 7 years old". We have traded titles since then, often having read the same authors.

The Doctor's latest recommendation was *Horse* by Geraldine Brooks. He practically guaranteed I'd like it. It is a good book, a good story, chapter by chapter of each character over the years from 1853 until 2020. There is the obvious storyline about the horse, of course, but Brooks also includes art, science, different cultures and history. With it being set in the 1850's and 60's there is a lot about slavery, being owned and being free. The horse and his trainer are both property of the owner, their lives dependent on performance: how often and how fast they can run and win!

As in her other books, she weaves history into her stories. The research is obvious. Who knew Jackson Pollack's convertible would be in a book about a horse? Mostly I am ambivalent about this or that

book, but I'd recommend you give this one a read.

Ironically, I finished the book just before the 2024 Preakness.

After Annie by Anna Quindlen

I don't like to read the blurb on the book flap before I read the book. I don't want to know about the story; I want the author to reveal it to me. So when I started Anna Quindlen's *After Annie*, I didn't realize it would be about death. Spoiler alert: Annie dies on the first page. The rest of the book is about her husband, children, best friend dealing with Annie's sudden and untimely death. All of the book is about dealing with that death.

I have experienced too many deaths in my life to want to read a book about others experiencing the pain and memories. By a certain age all of us have had to deal someone special dying, but my father died early, my mother died early, my brother died early. I hate *Mother's* and *Fathers Days* because they only remind me of what I don't have. I hate not being able to talk to my parents,

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to share current life with them, to tell them about the children that have come after them. I hate that the children and grandchildren never got to know my mother and father. I hate that my brother's sons are growing and living exciting and productive lives without their father.

My nephews groan when I tell a story about my parents, because they have heard me say over and over, "you would've liked them, they would have

liked you." I hope someday they will forgive me for going on and on about people they cannot know.

In the book, the family learns to remember the mom, moves to a new house, visits her grave – and resolves all the grieving. I just wish I would've read the blurb so I knew what I was in for. I wish resolving grief was that easy.

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.

When I sleep on my right side, I have different dreams. Sometimes they are about not being able to perform the tasks I know I otherwise can. Like being able to fly, getting to the place in a dream story where flight is expected, and not flying. Sometime the lack is because of some perceived issue, like loss of headwind (as if I am a plane taking off of an aircraft carrier) or too much weight, unequally distributed. It isn't that I am or the air is any different, but my dream self finds these issues and suddenly I am unable to. It could just as easily be an inability to get to class on time, or play the trumpet like Miles Davis, or drive successfully through traffic to get to the hospital, or escape after robbing the bank. And I cannot explain that it happens more often than not when I am sleeping on my right side. Is this a dominant subconscious side? Or is it left-brain-right-brain mechanics coming into play? I don't know.

Blue Ridge - Cyberspace

it more. When doing things, don't do other things. Write what you are writing. Read what you are reading. Eat when eating, sleep when sleeping. When you speak to someone, say what you mean. When they are speaking, listen to what they are saying.

So by now it must seem like I'm blowing sunshine...wherever. And I guess I am. Is it because I think it will all work out? No, but I do want to be here if and when it does.

And what did the wise one say? It will all work out in the end. If it hasn't worked out, it's not the end.

Garry - editor@blotterrag.com

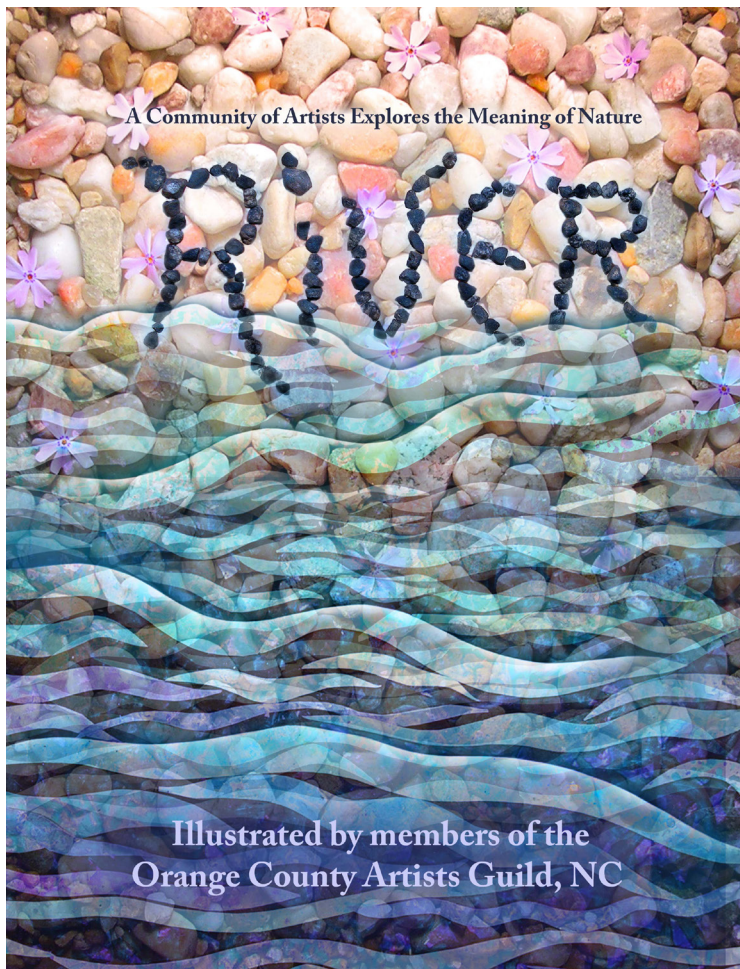
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Zary Fekete grew up in Hungary. He has a debut novella (Words on the Page) out with DarkWinter Lit Press and a short story collection (To Accept the Things I Cannot Change: Writing My Way Out of Addiction) out with Creative Texts. He enjoys books, podcasts, and many many many films. Twitter and Instagram: @ZaryFekete

James C. Clar is a writer and teacher who divides his time between the wilds of Upstate New York and the more congenial climes of Honolulu, Hawaii. Most recently, his short fiction has been published in the *Sci-Phi Journal*, *Antipodean Sci-Fi*, *Freedom Fiction Journal* and *Hackwriters*.

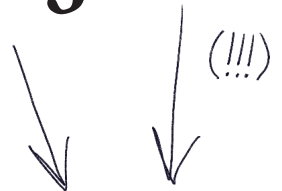
Mary Fallon is from Buffalo, New York and is a voracious (and opinionated) reader. Her mother, Edna, got the wagon out every week and dragged the Fallon children to the local library. It became an addiction for all 4 siblings. In the 80's Mary was living at home and made the mistake of leaving her partially read book on the kitchen table when she went to work. When Mary returned from her day, Edna was almost through the book. Mary never left an unfinished book out again.

Joseph A. Miller is an Associate Professor of Art at S.U.N.Y. Buffalo State University, where he has taught drawing and painting since 1997. Miller's work is in numerous public and private collections, and has been shown internationally in Finland, China, Poland and the Czech Republic, as well as across the United States, from Berkeley, California to Cambridge, Massachusetts. Artist Website: <https://artdesign.buffalostate.edu/directory/joseph-miller> He writes, "I focus primarily on the human figure depicted in environments that create a context for psychologically charged open-ended narratives. Many of these narratives explore ideas about power and vulnerability, about enchantment and play. Children are often featured because children often play. Quality of light is a common theme. In particular, the way in which atmospheric light and locale can suggest a sense of mystery and silence. These works are dark, humid and hopefully, at their best, memorable. For me, the most successful are those that evoke the feeling that an event is about to happen or has recently happened. Images of figures or figures in landscapes, in groups or in isolation, share a common feeling of significance. Wholly absorbed within themselves or the dialogue shared between one another, they wait for the unfolding of their private story.



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of Nature,
as seen
through
the eyes of
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