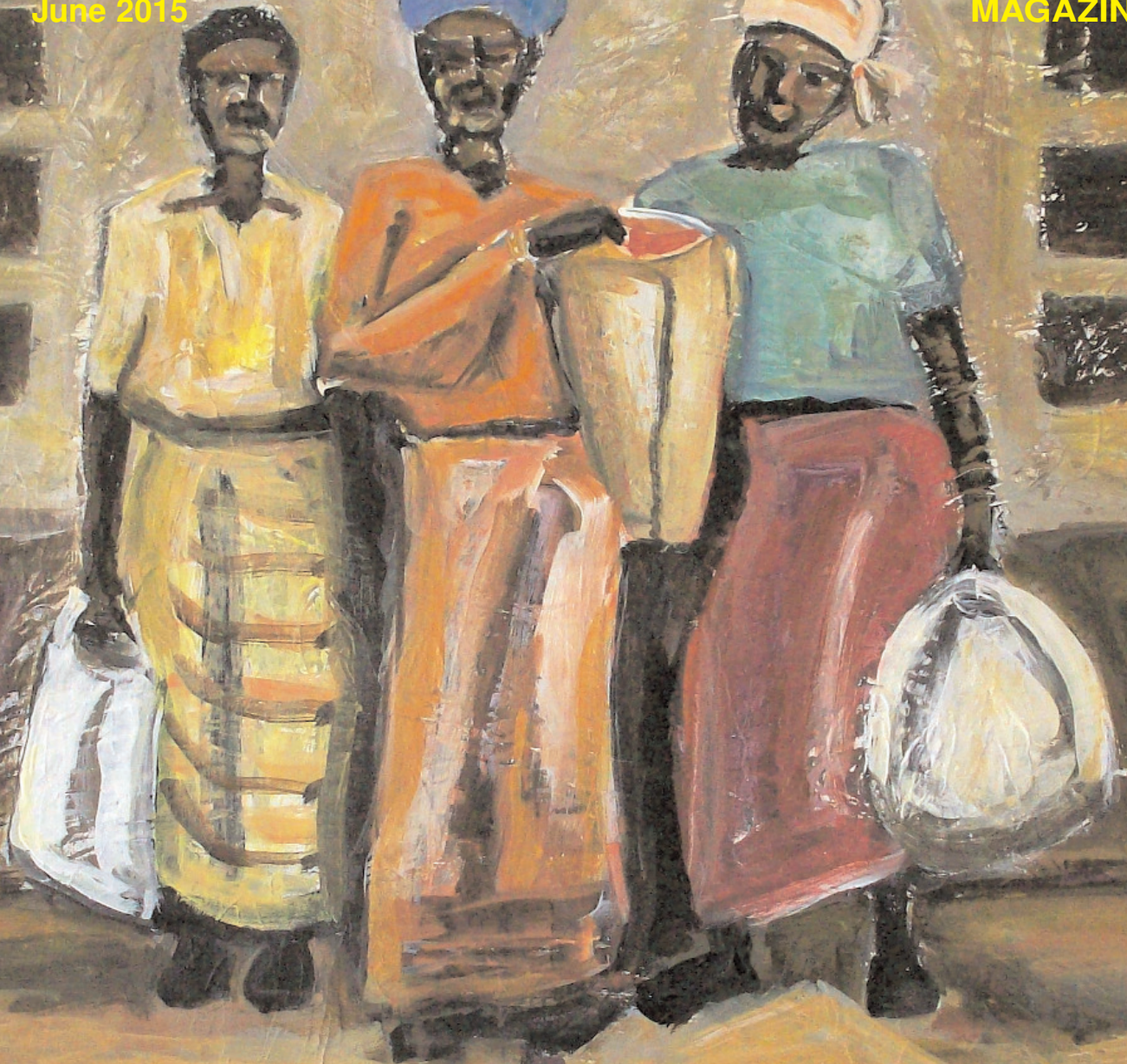


*Well, alright! Drew Albenesius, Allen Forrest, Holly Day,  
Stephen Reeves, Sonny Rag , a new Five Minutes With,  
Phil Juliano, and The Dream Journal*

# The Blotter

June 2015

MAGAZINE



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Subscriptions Contact:  
 Martin K. Smith  
 M\_K\_Smith@yahoo.com  
 919.286.7760

Advertisers Contact:  
 Austin Richards  
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Submissions and Editorial Business to:  
 Jenny Haniver  
 mermaid@blotterrag.com

Garrison Somers, Editor-in-Chief  
 chief@blotterrag.com

919.933.4720 (business hours only! you  
 may call for information about snail-mail  
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Marketing & Public Relations Contact:  
 Marilyn Fontenot  
 marilyngfontenot@gmail.com  
 919.904.7442

COVER: "Women with coffee bean sacks"  
 by Allen Forrest. See centerfold for more

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## "The Swan Song of the Obsolete Staring the Future Paradigm in the Face"

I recently finished a first draft of a novel I've been working on for quite some time, and have paused to relate a few thoughts. About eight years ago, I published an essay on the death of an independent bookstore – one in which I used to hang out regularly. Not a sob story – that horse had been pulped – just semi-sweet nostalgia. Over the ensuing years, I've also interviewed authors on the state of publishing, to get a current perspective from folks currently living on their writing earnings. My questions were predictable: what did they think about the absorption of all the small publishing houses? What did they think about so much of what is determined to be worthy of reading being in the hands of five mega-publishers? As time soldiered on my questions changed, mutated. Because like local micro-breweries, little publishers began popping through the topsoil made from the decay of middle and large houses. They were here to fill in the blanks. To take two or three titles each year from local or regional authors through the maze to the finish line - a pretty volume, some minor sales success, a measure of self-worth.

Way back when, I was still in a "writing group," meeting monthly to read and talk and commiserate and waste an evening together. I think that writing groups are like mild pain-killers. If your writer's angst is not so bad, then suck it up and get to work. If your creative ache is awful, you won't get any relief from it (not too bad a metaphor if I do say so myself!) Over the years we tried to decode what was happening in publishing and predict what might be just over the horizon. We hit the mark sometimes: that the five monster mega-publishers would take up the bulk of shelf-space in any bookstore. The three (or two) mega-booksellers would create their own lines of books, titles culled from the not-so-recent past, from the classics, from the slush-pile, to be cash cows. The mighty online sales-site would move volume, would be a rich opportunity to create demand, but would not be able to sort out how to let the reader "browse." And so there would always be a need for the brick-and-mortar bookstore. And the lowly writer would have many opportunities to do something with their scribbles.

There were two things we didn't understand. Secondly: that publishers had never tried to find us books we wanted to read, but were always trying to find us books that we would buy. They were simply in the business of selling, by hook or by crook, using every marketing tool available, including shock and awe. Not necessarily because the books were actually good. No cynicism here - and no one can blame them. They theorized that readers will often read what they are told to by people they trust: family, friends, famous faces and the voices of many presented as a united front. (Hence development of the concept of crowd sourced product reviews, and the suggestion field on your search screen.) And firstly, that this theory would cause them to no longer bother with receiving submissions - that the possibility that there was a new Mockingbird or

Mockingjay being touted by an agent (or even in their slushpile,) did not warrant the cost of staffing reading or marketing teams to investigate and nurture. Better by far - in the near term - to go with name-brand authors and then poach the lucky cream that magically floats to the top despite there being far fewer opportunities for doing so.

There is so much to say, to have discourse civil and uncivil about regarding writing and publishing that I wanted to step back and point out one once-peculiar, now-common detail. We are free. We are free to read anything that crosses our radar. We are free to point our radar at anything we want. That is a hell of a thing. So what does that mean to the writer? I think it means "go for it." Write. Publish.

And on the final hand, we didn't or couldn't anticipate the sh\*tstorm brought on attempting to successfully conjugate the verb "to publish." Because writers are spastic in the cosmic sense, such confabulation goes on incessantly, tilting between tautology and cultural echolalia. The rise of internet content, blogs, online-periodicals and newspapers, and e-books was supposed to fill the squeezed pimple of the old-school printed page. The fading stigma of "vanity" publishing would coincide with the evaporation of the writer's fear of never ending up in print, on paper, in hard-cover, on a bookshelf in a store. Don't like what's happening? Do it yourself. Need help doing it yourself? A industry of ghosts, editors, layout tools, printers, distributors, marketing agents would rise from the steaming graves of the old-school. But, no. There is "writing" and "writing." Are you published? Really? So much, the poet said, depends...

There will always be a hierarchy - as an editor I should know that - in any community. The community of writers: a community that is not a community - in which each member is alternately star-struck and derisively dismissive, has a unique feeling for how the world ought to go, what is valuable to them, what they think works, what they like and hate, who does it right and who fails on the epic scale. You know, normal.

But we don't have to be this way. Writers are not really in competition with each other, despite all of the fatuous contests and judging and limited shelf space and critique and stars assigned and bestsellership. For crap's sake, it's all just a matter of taste. A book is a book is a book; published by Mighty Old and Sons, or through a fund-my-printing dot com. Books don't compete with each other. Ask anyone with a book in their hand: do you really decide to read one book instead of another? Or are you just finishing one today and starting another tomorrow?

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

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CAUTION

*Roll, roll, roll, ya gotta thrill.*

## "Checkout Line"

by Drew Albenesius

Justin

Don't look at the clock. Just be glad it's slow right now. You can just stand here and look alert until someone comes. Stand up straight, hands behind the back. What's her name is over in produce today. I think she may be a lesbian. Either way, she seems like she might pull out a knife and stab somebody if they tried to hit on her. Don't look at the clock. This coffee isn't bad today. I guess it must have been a fresh batch. You can't complain too much about a job that involves long stretches of standing still and drinking coffee. The people though... Sometimes it's just too much humanity smacking you in the face.

When it's busy, it's just a constant stream of personalities, some more abrasive than the others, and you have to let them be as terrible as they please. And when it's slow... Boy it can really drag sometimes. That's why you can't look at the clock. You know you haven't been here more than an hour. You'll just make it go slower.

The caffeine is starting to kick in. One and a half cups will do that. I like a nice caffeine buzz. I can take whatever these assholes can throw at me today. Just six or so hours? Piece of cake. And then I can go meet up with Lexie. And have a good cocktail. She's funny as hell – always entertaining to hang

out with. Still don't know if it's headed anywhere though. One kiss two weeks ago does not a binding commitment make on either of our parts. She's cute in a nerdy way but I'm not sure I could ever call her my girlfriend. Ugh, that's the wrong way to think about it. You shouldn't make decisions like those based on what people will think. No one cares about your business that much. No one gives a fuuuuck.

I can just stand here at my register and let the world go by. I guess I'm pretty lucky in the grand scheme. I could be a 13 year old in Central Africa, forced to tromp through the jungle with an AK-47. Look how nice it is outside! Won't be too long until I'll be on my lunch break. I can grab a slice of pizza, go sit out there and read a magazine. This day ain't shaping up too bad.

Here's someone. Late 30s, upper-middle class woman buying Tofu – big surprise. Performance athletic jacket, yoga pants, fancy earrings, wedding ring – check, check, check and check. I would. She's probably had a couple of



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youngsters, but these rich women around here keep up with the Jones's by keeping their abs flat and their asses from sagging.

"Hello. How are you today ma'am"

Jesus, what does anyone need with this much yogurt. Oh well, at least it all rings up easily – no punching in numbers manually or calling a manager because the inventory guys fucked something up. Nope, I'm just doing my job, feeling the flow. Being in the moment. Letting it... Hell yes! What a great song. The intercom music can be so hit or miss but they're playing the classic shit today. Yessir, this day is going my way. Long distance...runaround. I probably shouldn't sing while I'm ringing up customers but...oh well. Can anyone really get that mad at me for digging a song?

"Would you like bags today ma'am?"

Wow, maybe I was wrong. She doesn't seem happy at all. In fact, she seems really pissed off. I wonder if it's my singing...

### Monica

Do I have everything? Let's see... tofu, apple juice for the kids, kale... Shit, I forgot yogurt. I don't really have time to go all the way back to that corner of the store. Visiting hours at the hospital end at

4. It's already five after three. I'll be lucky to get half an hour with mom. It's so touch and go since she had the operation on her lung. I can't miss a single day with her. Any day now could be her last... Dammit, I have to go get it.

Okay, so many options... The greek stuff is on sale, ten for ten. I might as well go ahead and stock up. There's no telling how crazy this coming week is going to be, with mom in the hospital and the kids out of school early for standardized testing. I don't want to get caught without any yogurt again. Goddamn Chrohn's disease. February was hell, when the ice storm hit and I wasn't able to get to the grocery store. If I have a cup in the car on the way to the hospital, I'll probably be fine during Abby's recital tonight. Ugh... I'll barely be able to pick her up from school and get her ready after I leave the hospital today...

"Fine, thank you."

Well, that probably sounded a little bitchy. I hope he doesn't take it personally. He seems like a nice enough kid – probably a student. I just don't have the time or presence of mind to get into a conversation today. Do I have enough gas to get to the hospital? Let's see, I filled up... Ugh, not this fucking song. Jeff used to play this in his Camaro all the time. And he would always

wear that Yes t-shirt – I don't think he ever washed it. That day... He wouldn't go with me to the clinic because he had to work on his final physics paper. Sure, he put up half of the money, but I needed him there with me. It was half his fault anyway. I had never felt so alone and scared as I did in that waiting room. And then when I got back to the apartment, there he was with that loser Zell, smoking pot and listening to Long Distance Runaround...

You've got to be kidding me. The kid is singing along? This fucking day just couldn't get any better.

"No, I don't need bags."



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## "Monster at the Door"

by Stephen Reeves

Three in the morning. A breeze whips the curtains and Christian retreats further into his blankets. "Maybe we should close the window," he whispers softly to his storybook.

His castle is there, just under the windowsill, with soldiers and knights carefully placed. Waiting for him. Dust passes through a moon-beam and settles around the toy like gently falling snow. The light does not come much further into the room.

Christian pushes against the headboard, bunching the blankets around him. Yet he can't find his way back to the story, instead his eyes are drawn to the bedroom door.

"Mother?" He whimpers. She used to keep the monsters where they belong. Not anymore. More covers have been thrown off than nightmares.

Cold air curls his nose with memories of the neighbour's garden. Those dreams always began with the clear sound of birds, and the wonderful smell of breakfast on the stove. For a small moment they are back with him. Fresh bacon mingles with an open window. Poppies and

Snapdragons from a neighbour's garden swirl together with fresh cut grass and raspberry tart. Somewhere in a nearby oak a little Tanager cries *perky tucky tuck tucky* and a sparrow flirts.

Another gust rattles the old panes. Christian winces, and the storybook flies from his hand.

It is 3 AM.

He can hear the pages flutter in the dark. But that book fell somewhere between the wardrobe and the door. The door - it sits there half open, hinting at what may be beyond. The boy begins to panic, shivering and closing his eyes. Tighter. Christian's head hurts from the pressure of trying to forget. He can't. Hate creeps towards him. Angry, wild, but familiar. Every night since his mother's been gone has been the same.

Dark shades of furniture swing into dizzying clarity, rising, and shuddering as the boy coughs. The air thickens to become a lump in his throat, whistling out in short *hisses*. Not tonight. He's not going to let the monster have him. Slowly Christian inches towards the edge of his bed. Clinging to a wooden post he looks down and to his left. There a blanket

lays on top of a small wooden boat. The boy grasps at the bedpost and leans into the wood.

The wardrobe looms. Where before the etchings and designs had been little more than hazy blurs to him, now they came into focus. Unicorns, dragons, elves; he could remember when these things filled his dreams. That time seemed so long ago, lost in between the pages of a fairy tale.

Three-thirty AM. The sound of a car door being slammed shut is better than any clock.

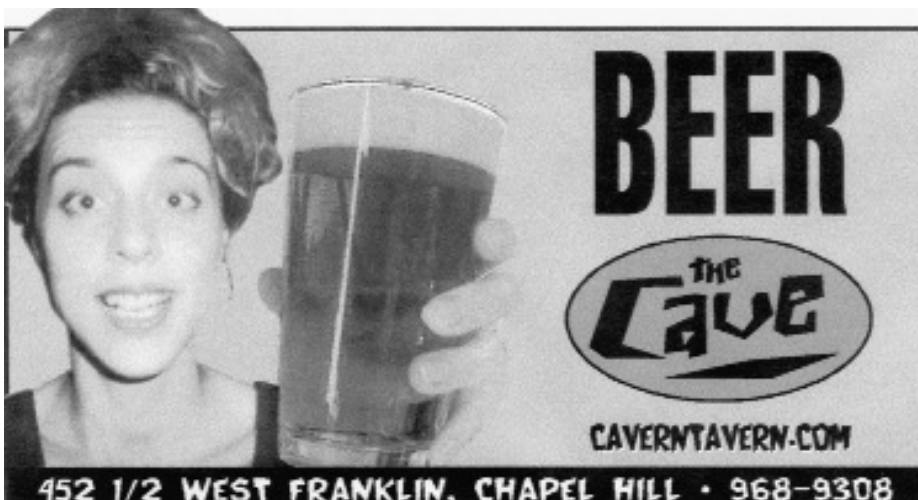
"Fucking assholes.." alcohol has stolen his father's voice and slurred it. "Full of shit."

And the world is dark beneath the sheltering blankets. Wrapped up like a cocoon, not even the floor below is allowed to touch Christian.

"Where the hell..."

The blankets shrink and fall around the fold as he breathes, but he made no other sound. The slow creak of his door being opened echoes in the lonely room. Christian huddles against the bedpost. Too late. Every night is the same, the monster always gets him.

But monsters, he thinks bitterly on his book. Monsters can be slain with the right weapon. Tomorrow is the first day of spring. Maybe then the neighbour's shed will be unlocked.



# "Time Travel in a Bottle"

by Sonny Rag

Last time he saw anyone who remembered him was 1981. They had been drinking pitchers of dime-draft at the Hog-Penny, a local watering-hole. Latricia was the bar-wench, infiltrating the daydreams of every red-blooded man who soberly clambered down the stone steps into the joint. In the Hog there was a seat that was his whenever he arrived.

Later, he would hear a ditty about a place where everybody knows your name, bringing an inexplicable grin on his face. Of course, entering his true cocktail years, he had no place, no mates, and no one knew him. In the city to which he'd migrated labels were not something one retained. Smart phones had unmimed digits. Occasionally, he was satisfied with a barista saying "same again?" to him and bringing the appropriate concoction.

Mostly he worked long, allotting spare time for sleep. He ignored E-mail, and one by one the old crew fell off the radar. It didn't trouble him so much at the time, but he realized that he had no friends left, only co-workers, contemporaries and peers. Fine, too busy anyhow. With remote access, tele-commuting, Eye-emming and hell, he wasn't even a clip-on badge to security guards with a lazy "morning, pal." The dude who worked evenings at the ABC said "Hey, fella," as if he recognized him, but it might just as well have been his way. They stocked Boodles, and while no, he couldn't have said that this was done solely for him, he did ask himself once, ago, wasn't it an odd brand among the Tanqueray and Beefeater crowds.

Finally he was alone. Don't forget unloved, he smiled crookedly at his reflection in the mirror. Even this wouldn't have been insurmountable, had he not recently and ironically been laid off from the very job into which he put so much time. No more morning shaves for me, he gave himself a sad wink. The current turn of events was disconcerting. I've put off getting married, having children and writing a novel, he thought, sipping a G-n-T. To be this?

He might have called for a do-over – a mulligan if he played golf but that required golf buddies to play with - but you have to know where you want to do it over from.

When was I last someone? he asked no one. The foul up seemed geologic, a massive shift somewhere. Can't fix something so big. Might just as well go back in time, he thought. He drove all night and half the following day. Why not?

But the Hog-penny wasn't there. In its place was an old house. Uncharacteristically, he knocked. The person answering knew nothing of a watering-hole being here in some past she hadn't experienced. She

made a subtle "what are you thinking?" face and he didn't press it.

What was Latricia's last name? Who were his friends back then?

There were other names he recollected, and sitting in a spanking new cyber-café he searched them on his touch-thing. No hits. Well, girls marry, the guys never achieve google-fame. In the campus library an old yearbook had no class pictures of him, no mention in a club or society. He recognized nobody.

Standing alone in a noisy dance-club, holding a colorful drink he didn't taste, he concluded that some future quantum science event had interrupted his life, preventing the Hog-Penny altogether, and his friends from meeting. He'd never even attended university or held a job. In his current time-line, he wasn't aware of the interruption. Setting his drink down, a chill wriggled down his back. No, cosmic events have purpose. This was nothing at all. Why me? he wondered aloud, and no one answered.



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## "Five Minutes with: Rich Ehsen"

*Ed. Note: Our faithful Blotterfriend Laine Cunningham (author of many books, including "Message Stick" and "Seven Sisters") brings us a few moments with Rich Ehsen, political journalist and author of the work in progress Gen Wars: Voices of America's Generational Culture War.*

(<http://www.richehsen.com/>)

Laine Cunningham: You've been jetting around the country working on a big new project...big in the sense of what it encompasses and big in terms of what it might do on the market. Tell me more about *Gen Wars: Voices of America's Generational Cultural Clash*.

Rich Ehsen: It's been slower going than I would have hoped, but I've adopted the mindset that it will be done when it is done right. I'm notoriously impatient but rushing through really complex stuff like this generation transition we're going through from the Boomers to the Millennials via Gen X won't serve my purposes at all. In the book, I really want to showcase some of the people across all of these generations that are doing good work in areas that matter, and where Boomers and the two

younger generations are alike and where they differ in their approach to it all. For instance, I'm planning a section on activists that profiles how activists in the Boomer generation compare to those working today from younger generations. I was at a writers conference in San Diego in January and was able to have a trio of agents look over my proposal. Two of them were pretty interested with some caveats, which I am working to address right now. So fingers crossed.

LC: What's the most important way Millennials can change their lives or world view?

RE: Be flexible in everything they do, and to think entrepreneurially. Not necessarily as if they are all going to start their own business, but more like they are the captains of their own ships and take responsibility for their own happiness and success. I sound all new age with that, but I really do believe that with technology there are more opportunities now than ever, but also more challenges to maximizing those opportunities. And to keep giving back at every opportunity. Life really is a team sport.

LC: Any wisdom for Gen X?

RE: Same as above, with the addition of also being willing to let your guard down a bit more. Gen X really has got screwed a bit in all this. Boomers and the Silents did a lot of things right, but we also did a lot of things wrong that Xers bore the brunt of. Subsequently, they tend to be a lot more guarded and wary. Stats show they are the hardest to market too, the least susceptible to sales pitches, etc. That's a good thing, but they also tend to be the most cynical of the generations, which is not a good thing.

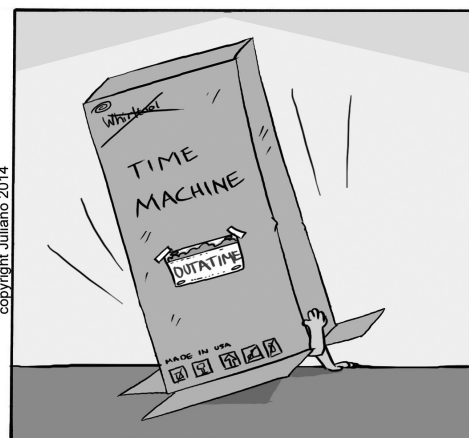
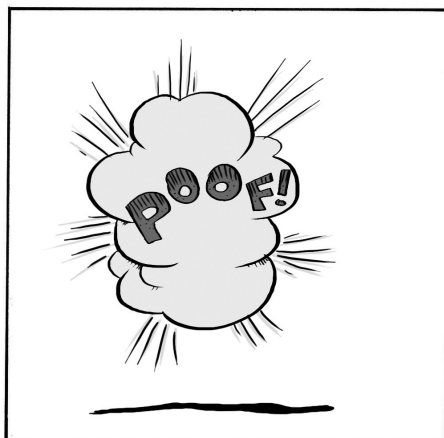
LC: Plans for post *Gen Wars*?

RE: I'm really energized right now. I'm working on some new fiction, though as of this moment I'm not sure what form it will take. I'm just letting the story form and move, almost on its own, every day. It has been great. I'm also for sure going to work on more screenplays and maybe even produce another short movie.?



### Best In Show

by Phil Juliano





## "The Things I Wish Would Go On Without Me"

by Holly Day

I imagine the stories we'll tell at each other's funerals  
about the day I wake up and find him cold, how I imagine his face  
wonder how to talk frankly with him about love, and death, and what I want him to do

the things I plan to do when he's gone.  
how many years have to pass between us  
before I can tell him how I'd be dead without him beside me at night  
how I imagine the silence of the house without him?

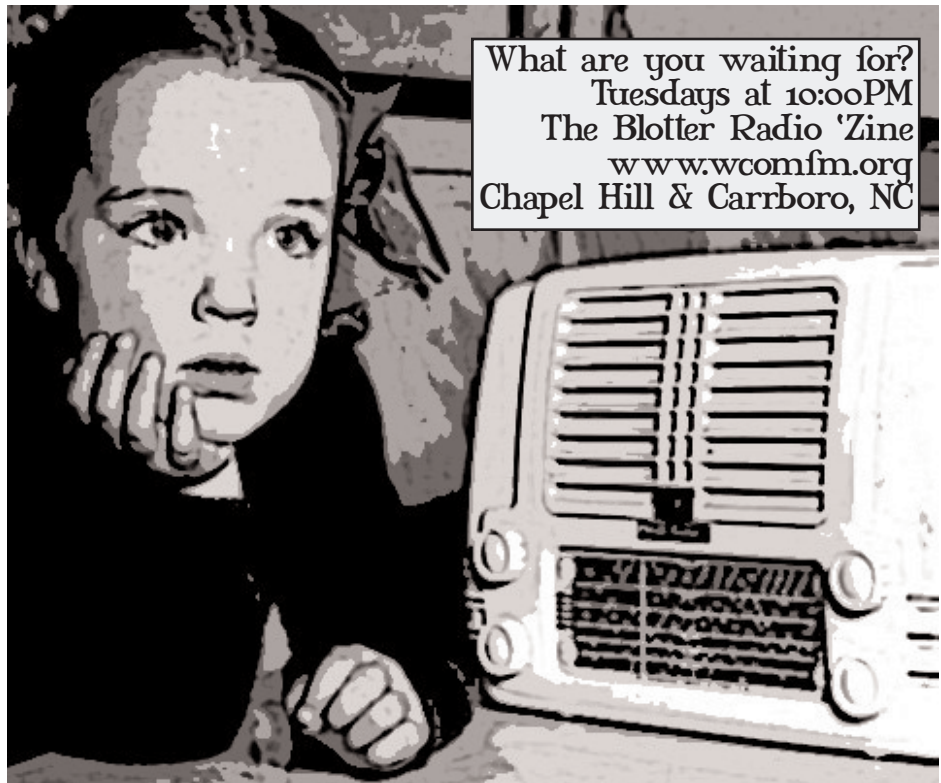
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## Two by Holly Day

### "Braille and Love"

the spot where someone dared you to put a cigarette out  
the jagged "x" just under my skin

like anthropologists, we explore  
the keloids I got in ninth grade  
the circle of blue dots on your arm, all the damage

a twelve-year-old can do with a safety pin and India ink,  
the badly-knit bones broken by a drunk stepfather

fingertips exhuming each other's damaged pasts.

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## "With Fire For Eyes, A Mouth Full Of Grubs"

in my living room is a woman  
dirt under her chipped nails

pouring out of her very skin,  
like tentacles underwater

of sick sea serpents  
in my kitchen is a man

criss-crossed with old scars and new bruises  
dangling by a hook

ever since I bought that cursed locked storage chest  
from that guy with the sinister laugh and the bad facial hair

at the boarded-up second-hand store  
things just haven't been the same around here

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# The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

Please send excerpts from your own dream journals.

If nothing else, we'd love to read them.

We won't publish your whole name.

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

I was with a little girl. She didn't seem to be my daughter as a little girl, just some little girl in my care at the moment. We had to go to my car so I could take her somewhere. We were walking through the parking lot, and I could see the ocean. It was a beautiful day with puffy clouds on a blue sky. We looked up, and saw a guy attached to two huge yellow balloons. He was wearing a harness like you would wear to go para-sailing, but he was attached to the balloons like they were a big wide jetpack. Just then, a guy on a hot pink surfboard floated overhead. The surfboard must have been a balloon too. He was lying on it just like he was in the ocean, and smiling as he floated past. Just then, I remembered and said out loud "Oh, right, the Carrboro Music Festival is today!"

Suddenly, I was with my daughter, Kristen. She was her current age, and the little girl had disappeared. We got to the car, and Kristen had parked it. The car was about three inches away from the car next to it. She asked if it would be easier if I got in the back, which was about three and a half inches from the car next to it. She got in the front, and I got in the back, and I couldn't figure out the seatbelt. It had two straps in the middle, and one seemed way too loose. Kristen kept trying to tell me how it worked, but I wasn't getting it. After a while she told me we should switch places and I should drive. "Just climb over the seat and we'll switch", she said. We were moving through traffic as she was talking, so I said "No, that's OK" and just sat there and gave up on the seatbelt.

After a few minutes the car stopped. I thought we might switch places then, but I saw that we had driven onto an escalator and were going down. The car doors were jammed up against the rails, so there was no getting out. I was very confused.

At the bottom of the escalator, we got out and went into a room. It turned out to be a sort of hospital room. There was a nurse in the room who knew my daughter. She was very friendly and they started chatting. The nurse said "Everette left his pants here, I'll get them for you." She then handed Kristen a large pair of distressed jeans with gold sparkles on the bottom foot or so (Everette is one of Kristen's grandfathers, and he would never even wear distressed jeans, much less ones with gold glitter). Kristen and the nurse talked for a while about how Everette left the hospital - I think the hospital and his family wanted him to stay, but he insisted on going home. The nurse was shaking her head, but said she could understand how he felt. We left the room with the glitter pants, and I woke up.

Sleepy Becky - cyberspace



## CONTRIBUTORS:

**Andrew “Drew” Albenesius** writes, “I am a 2010 graduate of the College of Charleston and have never had any fiction published. I currently live in Athens, GA, where I am a working musician.”

**Stephen Reeves** was born in Huntsville, Alabama in 1980, but grew up in a small community just on the edge; Madison. He attended the University of Alabama in Huntsville, and then later Athens State College, majoring in Accounting. During this time he began writing his first serious pieces while working through college. After living in the same area for over thirty years Stephen met his future wife in 2010, and in 2012 they were married. He currently resides in Switzerland with his wife, two cats, and an obsessive pomeranian.

Graphic artist and painter **Allen Forrest** was born in Canada and bred in the U.S. He has created cover art and illustrations for literary publications and books. He is the winner of the Leslie Jacoby Honor for Art at San Jose State University's Reed Magazine and his Bel Red painting series is part of the Bellevue College Foundation's permanent art collection. Forrest's expressive drawing and painting style is a mix of avant-garde expressionism and post-Impressionist elements reminiscent of van Gogh, creating emotion on canvas. Look for him on: <http://allen-forrest.fineartamerica.com/> and <https://twitter.com/artgrafiken>.

Blotterfriend **Holly Day** was born in Hereford , Texas , "The Town Without a Toothache." She and her family currently live in Minneapolis , Minnesota , where she teaches writing classes at the Loft Literary Center . Her published books include the nonfiction books *Music Theory for Dummies*, *Music Composition for Dummies*, *Guitar All-in-One for Dummies*, *Piano All-in-One for Dummies*, *A Brief History of Nordeast Minneapolis*; the poetry books *Late-Night Reading for Hardworking Construction Men* (The Moon Publishing) and *The Smell of Snow* (ELJ Publications); and a novel, *The Book Of* (Damnation Books). Her needlepoints and beadwork have recently appeared on the covers of The Grey Sparrow Journal, QWERTY Magazine, and Kiki Magazine.

**Sonny Rag** appears from time to time, finds a need, fills it, and fades away before the fish smells.

**Phil Juliano** is just beginning to notice that spring has arrived in Minneapolis. He's at work on many projects, including a graphic novel. *Ed. Note: This month, we begin the saga of "little Peej" which I already know about, so I'm not going to tell you anything!*



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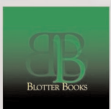
A Southern college town and its thriving local music scene,  
where the music's neither "sacred" nor "profane" so long as it's  
good...

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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