

The Blotter

November 2004

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Art by Timothy Bryan Hill. Comix by Angi Shearstone. Stories from Lee Greenwood and Rick Doble. The poesy of Gary C. Wilkens, Ava Morgan, Alson H. Wheeler, Todd Jenkins, and Greg Brown. Plus, Marty Smith's "Paper Cuts" and the Dream Journal.

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 more from this artist.

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 available, 5 for \$5. Inquire about availabili-
 ty by e-mail: ediot@blotterrag.com.

This magazine may contain typos or bad words

Items Worth Mentioning

from the desk of Johnny Pence

The Devil Made Me Do It

Seems like exactly one year ago I was writing in this space about some-
 thing horrible the magazine had done which lost us advertisers and
 distribution sites. Here we go again, I reckon. Maybe the Irrisistible Urge to
 Self-Destruction is an annual event.

Okay, so, about the back cover: I'm not sorry. I know, we always "strive to
 be apolitical," but a feller can only strive but so hard. If it helps, I planned that
 cover before we knew the outcome of the election, and I think it would've
 been better if the other guy had won (I could've used a lot more "revolution-
 ary" language). This doesn't mean we're all-of-a-sudden interested in political
 submissions, and I really hope we aren't forced to do something like this again.
 A poster version is available as a .pdf download from the website, so you can
 print a hundred copies and hang them up at the post office if you want.
www.blotterrag.com/hail.pdf.

And seriously: I mean absolutely no disrespect to vets or soldiers, sailors,
 marines, or airmen. *Y'all do a hell of a job* and have everybody's respect for
 your courage and devotion to duty.

That's all I have to say this month.

—ediot@blotterrag.com

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 giftee's address in that slot instead of your own. We don't care.

I (also?) want the following back issues! At **five bucks** for an envelope
 filled with five magazines, I'd be silly to pass that up!

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| ___ May '03 (debut issue f. Gary Snyder) | ___ Feb '04 (lovers and losers) |
| ___ June '03 | ___ Mar '04 |
| ___ July '03 | ___ Apr '04 |
| ___ Aug '03 | ___ May '04 |
| ___ Sep '03 (sold out) | ___ Jun '04 |
| ___ Oct '03 (got us in trouble) | ___ Jul '04 (all poetry/pictures) |
| ___ Nov '03 (our response to trouble) | ___ Aug '04 |
| ___ Dec '03 (all fiction) | ___ Sep '04 |
| ___ Jan '04 ("unsettling") | ___ Oct '04 (society/anxiety) |

I-95 Love Song

by Lee Greenwood

Sometimes I find beauty in the most unexpected places. So many cities lay strung out on this freeway; a junkie's vein transporting poison and pleasure on its way to the ocean. It promises to feed the soul but kills the heart. We're approaching yet another dying city on our journey south towards a home hundreds of miles away, hundreds of miles too close. The smoke from your lips leaves the open window and disappears into spray rising from a passing semi. Gray eyes scan gray skies over a gray highway. The bypass beckons with a promise of unimpeded, uninspired travel on eight lanes of newly paved sterile suburban glory. I choose the left hand path, through the center of the city.

I announce my intent, voice scarred from screams and smoke. My words fall flat and unanswered. You're asleep: eyes closed in blissful oblivion, unaware of the traffic, the rain-soaked roadway, the metropolis rising on the horizon, lips half-open, half-smiling in some sweet, wicked dream.

The city swallows the freeway. A soft misty mantle shrouds skyscrapers and smokestacks alike, all muted in the same somber elegance. I feel neurotic strains of twisted metal through the steering wheel, bass beats traveling through my fingers and sinking to the bottom of my soul, lead gray and lead heavy. I am one with the rain and the road, the music and the motor, the city and the sky: a utopian union in this dystopian downtown. The skyline, flat against the freeway, hides dreams and despair behind the

dying factories and high-rise temples of commerce. The air smells of lust and decay, gasoline and summer rain. July's kisses land wet and warm on my cheek through the open window, his warm gentle embrace feels like velvet. His moist breath pulls at your dirty hair, framing your face in thick contrails. Still, you sleep.

An old cathedral leans against the freeway, a bleak gothic beauty, empty with unrequited love. Its spire barely rises above the overpass. What god could possibly enter this sanctuary but perhaps our blessed father of internal combustion? He speeds by with an eight-cylinder hallelujah chorus, washing his disciples in a baptismal haze of carbon monoxide, leaving a hopeful heart and hurting head.

So hopeless, so helpless, so futile.

This brief time of grace passes, a fading image in the rear-view mirror, a gray reflection fading with each sixty mile-an-hour second. You sleep beside me in perfect peace, a reluctant muse, unaware and innocent.

The sprawling city cedes to the rolling hillsides, its thin fingers clutching the highway in a final futile death grip. Kudzu crawls over ancient oaks with slow suffocation. Emerald and violet glory belies murderous intent.

This picture remains acid-etched in safety glass, eternal, fragile, hidden.

Lee Greenwood is merely a pseudonym for a real person. But I've had a few e-conversations with the real person, and she seems pretty cool.

The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

I dreamed I stumbled across an old friend (who is a good-looking woman) sunbathing topless on a beach. I was very embarrassed to find her half-naked, and to make matters worse, she was sobbing terribly, very upset. She made it clear that she was also embarrassed, and just wanted to be left alone. I wanted to comfort her, but I was very uncomfortable with her state of undress. She also clearly wanted some privacy.

A little kid from down the beach came up and said, "I just wanted to thank you, lady, for showing off your killer rack!" I yelled to the kid's dad that he should discipline his little brat and that next time I saw that kid, "I want to see a bar of soap in his mouth!" The dad pulled a gun on me and ran up, threatening me. I could see that the gun was aimed over my left shoulder and would miss if he fired, so I grabbed it away from him. It turns out the gun was a toy, so I shot him and the little kid with the toy projectiles.

—S. L., Durham

I dreamed there were these nail-decal manicure kits that came in hypnotic '70s-style orange swirls. Then, if somebody showed you, you could see little cartoon monkeys in the swirls. Problem was that once you had seen the monkeys in the manicure decals, you started seeing them everywhere and went insane—literally, and in a very bad way. But people were buying them left and right. They were a big hit.

—J.P., Athens

Please send excerpts from your dream journals to Jenny at mermaid@blotterrag.com. If nothing else, we love to read them. We won't publish your whole name.

Six O'Clock Instant News

by Rick Doble

It's not the fact that I'm lying here wired into these monitors that bothers me. I hear them blip and beep, and when nurses come in they look up, check them first, instead of me. They're worried I might have another attack.

No, what really disturbs me is the other night at the ballpark, the fans shouting, the banks of bright stadium lights, the crack of the wood bat on the hard ball. And suddenly I was surrounded by swirling people, flashing blue, men looking down, being carried, seemingly flying along the highway with the sound of the siren.

And the trouble was I couldn't decide if it was real.

It wasn't the kind of distance some people feel during an accident, the ease of being an observer to my own predicament. It was related to my job, to who I am.

Each day I edit raw footage down to brief segments for the evening news hour. It's a deadline business, and always a vital story comes in at the last moment. Which means I have to view the tape, splice different parts together, hand it in by 6:17. I feel like an air traffic controller bringing a story down from its height of unstructured moment, guiding it toward the telecast, to a safe landing in its 30-second spot, the images zipping across my monitor like raw flesh. Like a doctor holding a throbbing organ that needs to be stitched together, then inserted back into a body to reenter the world. I reformat what people see, what they know.

At the ballpark I saw myself through a frame. I kept trying to rework the blue lights, the siren into a human interest story, but then it broke loose and carried me along with it. Yet I could not tell if it was

happening to me. And when I woke up in this hospital, I was scared for my life.

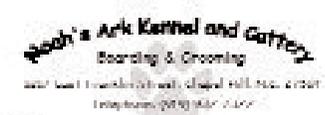
Over the last week here, I have become aware of odors, Lysol and alcohol. I thought I had forgotten how to smell. I find I'm even savoring the sound of squishing soft shoes on linoleum, and the cafeteria Jell-O and the sanitizing sheets, and light from my window fading on the blank sheet rock walls. These things come and go, and I don't have to edit them, rearrange or time them out. It's the first time in years I haven't been under a deadline.

When I'm lying in bed, my mind surmises through my past. I remember that making love to my wife was like watching a foreign art movie. When I pushed the hair away from her ear, kissed the soft down on her neck, a tiny hand ran along her spine, even when she held me inside her and we were breathing hard, I saw it on the screen with a thousand others watching.

In the mornings, here, I see the same thing in the doctor's faces. They check my chart, smile blankly at me, go on to the next patient.

And every noon when they bring the mail I'm surrounded by more and more get-well cards from the office, reassuring letters that my job is safe. On the evening news the two anchors wave at me, announcing to the world my fast recovery. And at night my heartbeat quickens, and nurses run in, afraid that I'm in trouble again.

During my wife's visits, I stare at her like I've never seen her before. And then I look down, because I'm not sure what's happening to me. I love my work. But didn't ever think



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it would become like a tight suit I'd have trouble wearing. She knows something's up. But she's letting me take my time, that's why I love her.

This morning in the early dawn my bed felt comfortable, almost too comfortable, and I listened for nurses to make their rounds. It seems I've grown to like the rhythm of the hospital.

But I also discovered something else gnawing away inside me, gnawing itself under the bruises I've received. As the doctors approached about nine, I found my breath grew short, my heart jumped, and my

throat was immediately dry, because I've just begun to realize what's going to happen next, that one day they'll read the clipboard at the end of my bed and say, "You know, Gerald, we'd hate to see you leave, but you're doing so well, we think it's safe now for you to go back home."

Rick Doble lives on North Carolina's Outer Banks, writes a lot, is a digital artist, and keeps a website at rickdoble.net. Tough life, huh, Rick?

Paper Cuts

Books You Might Not Have Read

by Martin K. Smith

The Angel of the Opera

Sam Siciliano, Otto Penzler Books, 1994

One of the fun things about Sherlock Holmes is imagining how he might've hooked up with various historical celebrities of his time. If you figure his time as being roughly from the 1870s to the 1920s, there's a huge list of intriguing people he could have met. In Nicholas Meyer's *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* he's analyzed off cocaine by Sigmund Freud; in Cay van Ash's *Ten Years After Baker Street* he confronts that charming Oriental arch-fiend Fu Manchu. Other tales have paired him with Teddy Roosevelt and Houdini, set him against Dracula and Jack the Ripper, involved him in the Dreyfus case and the Prisoner of

Zenda affair. I wouldn't be at all surprised to learn that Holmes pastiches by now outnumber Conan Doyle's original stories.

Here Holmes is summoned to Paris in 1890, where a character calling himself "Le Fantôme" has been giving attitude to the Opera House's new management. He sends letters—in blood-red ink, no less—demanding 20,000 francs annually, a private box, and a say in their human-resources planning; in particular that some little chorus girl named Christine Daae be promoted to the lead-diva role in an upcoming production of *Faust*. There have been mysterious mischiefs and sabotages, things gone missing, and most

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recently a stagehand found hanged in the lower cellars. The police say he hung himself, but the backstage staff are convinced the Phantom got him.

Holmes also meets the Comte de Chagny, whose younger brother Raoul has *les pants-hots* for Mlle. Daae. The Comte thinks she's nothing more than a scheming little

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The Blotter

Needs and Wants Your Contribution

So Give It Up

We prefer e-mail submission in all cases, and they go to

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underclass baggage who hopes to climb, via Raoul's hot pants, into a Viscountess-ship. He wants Holmes to watch the affair for a chance to buy her off. No sooner has Holmes gotten away from the Comte when Raoul himself rushes in, totally bugfuck with passion and jealousy. He'd been listening at Christine's dressing-room door and heard her talk to some mysterious male voice. When he charged in to confront this rival he found nobody else there, and no means of exit beside the door he'd just rushed in at. He wants Holmes to follow Christine and find out who the hell she was talking to. Then to top it all off, Holmes gets a bit of red letter to himself:

Your fame is nearly as great in Paris as in London. Truly it would be a tragedy if a genius such as yours were to meet its end at the Paris Opera, but such it must be if you choose to take the part of the managerial buffoons and meddle in my affairs. Do not trifle with the unknown and the unknowable. Return to your native land before it is too late.

With the profoundest respect, the Phantom of the Opera.

The game is afoot. Holmes pursues the Phantom; Raoul pursues Christine; and the Phantom pursues Christine's career, by such dubiously persuasive methods as dropping a chandelier on the *Faust* opening-night crowd when Christine isn't given the lead role. Holmes trails the Phantom to his subterranean lair, and discovers him to be a deformed, deranged musical genius named Erik,

who also has a grand passion for Christine. He's captured Raoul and threatens him with a Horrible Death (as any self-respecting arch-fiend would), then demands that Christine choose between them. After much melodramatic angst, she picks Raoul. Holmes persuades Erik not to blow up the Opera and himself out of spurred love, and even helps him escape.

It sounds quite thrilling, but I wasn't all that thrilled, for I already knew the story. Fact is, before *Phantom of the Opera* was a big bombastic Andrew Lloyd Webber musical, and before that a campy melodramatic silent film with Lon Chaney in the title role, it was an actual Victorian novel, which I've read. It too is campy melodrama, and requires one to suspend a chunk of disbelief the size of the Centre Pompidou, but within its own outré context it works. Siciliano's book follows the original's plot, incident for incident and character for character. Holmes's presence doesn't change the story or add any new twists. He felt to me like a fifth wheel, sleuthing round the outside of a tale that has already worked itself through without him.

Nonetheless, Siciliano's done a good riff on Holmes. His Sherlock is intelligent, keenly observant, brave, deeply emotional under an iron-willed self-control; barely tolerant of fools and their *merde du boeuf*, but compassionate to the truly distraught. Other characters measure up well, in their melodramatic way. Raoul is a believable young, passionate, shallow, French aristocratic twit. The elder Comte is a cold-hearted aristocratic asshole, the Opera managers a pair of pompous buffoons.

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Christine, catalyst of the whole uproar, has quite a range. Asked about ghosts, she babbles metaphysics:

The spirits of the dead are all about us, especially the souls of those who loved us and of the saints to whom we pray. I know that there are other spirits very different from us, full of great powers. There are the wicked devils and the angels, many, many beautiful angels. Archangels, seraphim, cherubim, and... others.

She calls Erik her "Angel of Music" because for several years he's been her secret vocal coach, heard but not seen from a secret passage behind her dressing room mirror. Asked about her diva-ria, she turns into a little spitfire:

"What do you think of Madame Carlotta's voice? I have heard—"

"She is an old cow, but she bleats like a billy goat!"

(Raoul's gonna have his hands full with her as Viscountess.) Erik-the-Phantom pushes the bounds of credibility, as melodrama arch-fiends often do. He's a deranged genius loner—a performance artist gone off the deep end—with some major self-pity issues:

There are men who can live alone without the society, the intimacy, of women, but I am not such a man. Knowing Christine has made it far worse. I thought, I truly thought, that she might love me. I can bear my dreadful

solitude no longer. The need is like a pain, a hunger. Perhaps I have committed many grave sins, perhaps I am damned, but was I not born that way? Did some monstrous God form me with this face as a jest? Why should a mere child be tortured so? Ah, but God only laughs at my questions and my pain. One thing I do know, men and women were made for one another, to love, to cherish each other, and I.... But you cannot understand. I only want to die.

(Holmes, a brilliant loner himself, can understand such neuroses, and uses them to advantage in their tense verbal battle at the climax.)

There's several pages on pre-electric stage lighting technology, which is interesting, even though it proves to have nothing to do with the plot. I would've enjoyed a little more atmospheric descriptions of 1890s Paris, and maybe some period celebs thrown in the mix—an Impressionist or two, Caruso, Sarah Bernhardt, Verlaine and Rimbaud, perhaps a visiting Oscar Wilde—but that's just me. The book suffices as it is. So if your family ever drags you unwilling to an opera, smuggle *The Angel of the Opera* along to prevent boredom. Just don't sit under the chandelier.

Marty Smith is either the world-record holder in speed-eating for hard-boiled eggs, mayonnaise, and pickled jalapenos, or he's the publisher of *The Blotter* and a volunteer at WXDU radio in Durham, NC. I'm not entirely sure which is the case.



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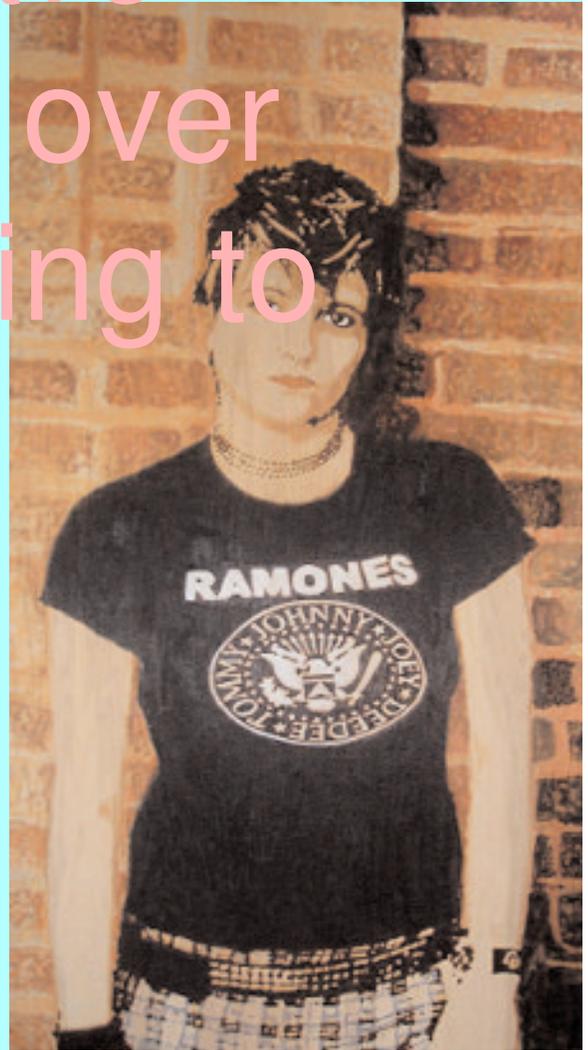
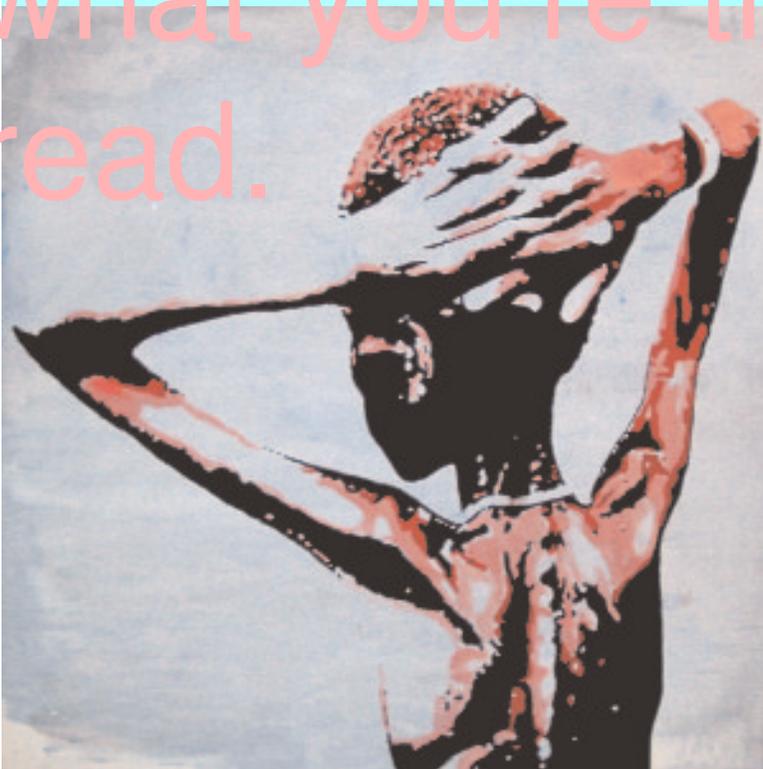
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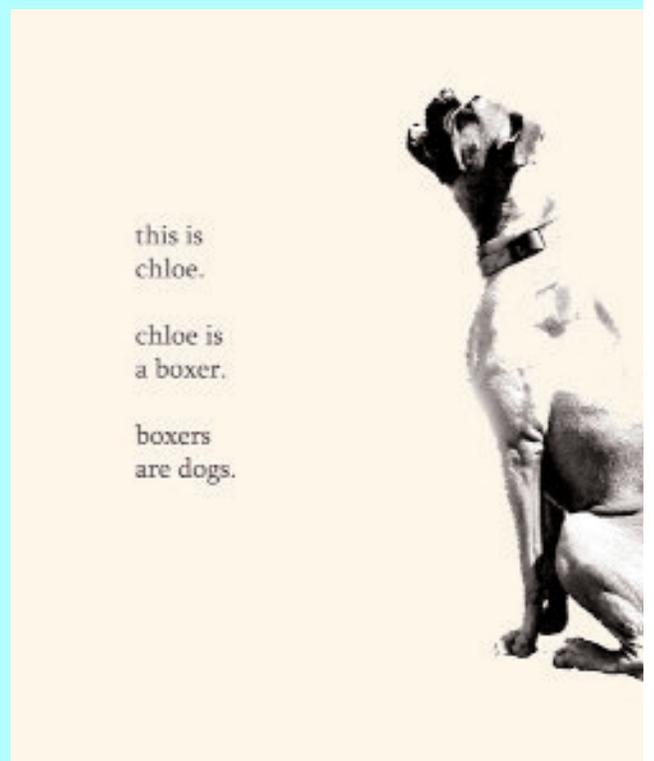
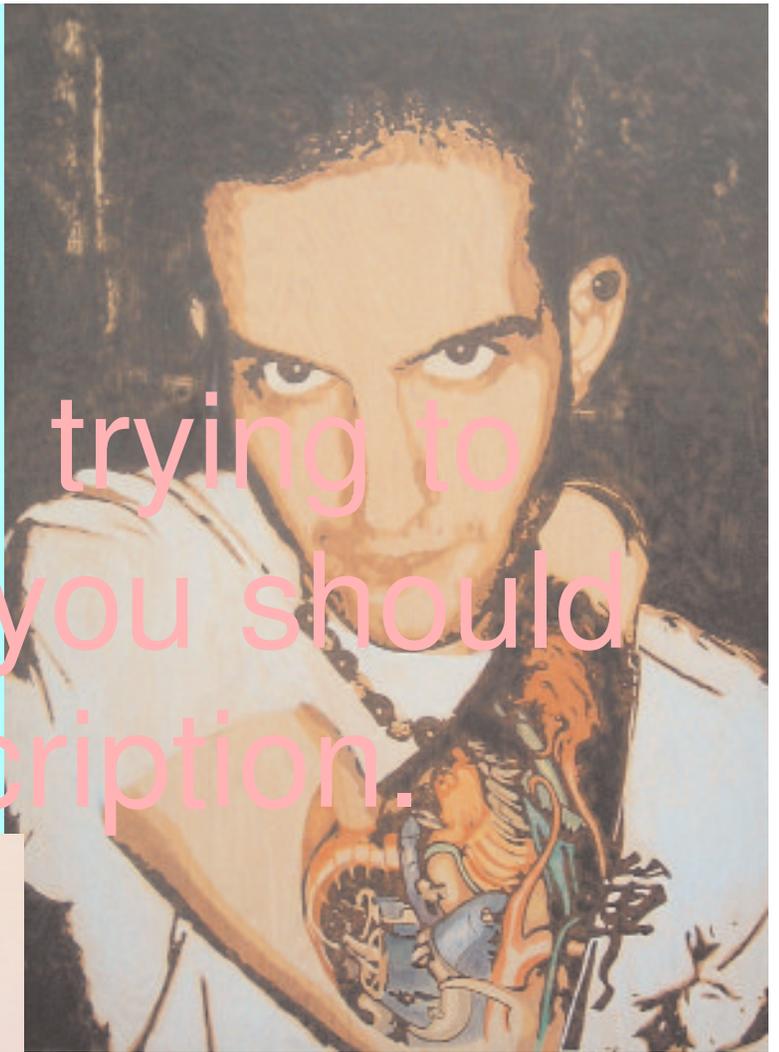
"Fire, wood, stains, spray paint, photos, paper, aluminum, put something in my hands and this is what you get.... I make my paintings big because I don't want them to become decoration in a living room, I want the room to revolve around the painting. I want the owner to have to wonder where couch or TV is going to go in order to fit the painting on the wall."

The works here are untitled, all at least four feet tall; the portraits are burned with blowtorches and stained on oak. Other media are print on aluminum and photo transfer and/or paint on linen. The artist showed at Temple Ball Gallery, Carrboro, NC, until Nov. 4, and his work is online at happyformoreason.com.



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this is
chloe.

chloe is
a boxer.

boxers
are dogs.

a poet washes dishes
by Gary C. Wilkens

Emanuel Carnevali, a poet from Northern Italy,
would waste his hours with wrinkled pages
beneath a bare bulb in scummy restaurant kitchens
before attacking the plates with water and soap
and fingernails like a maddened beast until they
were as glistening off-white as his mind.

united
by Todd Jenkins

shady grove slithers
grass withers in summer's scorching fashion
so dry it
begs to burn

lizard altar cracking
earth sprouts red wood with ambition
sky conquers

morning fog creeping
selling upon airborne sleeper sleeping
wakes to moist forehead kisses

Perhaps Near Forever
by Alson H. Wheeler

We gathered shells after the storm
it was an easier thing to do than talk
the waves were playful again
a few hours before it was so different
and
we aimed to let the waves touch our feet now
we showed each other different shells
and we would nod some sort of unspoken approval
neither of us had learned the names of different shells
so
we either were drawn to a certain shell or not
specific identity would have to wait
perhaps near forever...
right now calling it a shell was enough
there was a glossy book about shells at the coffee shop
we almost bought it but stopped
exact names wouldn't be used much anyway...perhaps a
party game
but no...it wouldn't come to that
we placed the shells on window sills
and took a moment to admire it all
they would be packed away soon or sooner
or just left for whoever comes next ... for something
is always left behind ... this always hap-
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certain moments occur ... pass ... cut a
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Elaborate Jane by Ava Morgan

She is always on time to every party in town;
Wearing her midnight pearls is mandatory in her mind.
She doesn't believe in herself without her elegant turs
Hanging all the way down to the tips of her feet.
Keeps a bottle of whiskey in one hand,
A Lucky Strike cigarette in the other.
She doesn't mingle; she just sits back in the
Corner longing for endless admiration.
Sometimes she glances into other peoples'
Eyes as they walk by, and forces her mouth
Into a smile when she catches them looking.
She is a very lonely woman, all the time
Just her pearls and her flash sequined
Dresses keep her staying alive.
Sometimes she'll just sit and lean back
In her chair believing that everyone at the
Party is flashing pictures of the sparkles in
Her eyes, her radiant smile, and her flowing
Diamond and ruby evening gown she can afford.
In her mind, she knows that they don't understand;
They can't relate to her overwhelming riches
And glory, so she makes herself believe.
Still no one loves her, never has.
She will always just sit there, and
Imagine she has close friends nearby.
All night she will live in a delusional state until the
Party's over, or until she wakes up and discovers reality

This is Ava Morgan's third poem in *The Blotter*. She and her guinea pig call the mean streets of Cary, NC, home.

Gar C. Willens is an American poet in Germany. He's at www.gcvilens.de

Todd Jenkins says he is a local [prolly Chapel Hill or Raleigh -ed.] poet except when he's not local or not writing poetry, and that he sleeps quite well, thank you.

Alson H. Wheeler is an artist from Greensboro, NC.

Greg Brown (p. 15) is apparently too busy writing poetry in Asheville, NC, to supply an author bio. Well, who can really blame him? It is a lot of work.



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Sleep Well

by

Angi Shearstone

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You sense something in the room...

...you see something standing over you.

...something dark, something shadowy...

You wake up.

You see your room...

...everything exactly as it should be...

BUT YOU CANT SCREAM.

BUT YOU CANT MOVE

Angi Shearstone is currently pursuing the insane notion of trying to make money from comics. While technically she has accomplished this to some small degree, it's far from a living. She has been sleep-paralysis free for over 5 years.

"Sleep Well" originally appeared in the collection *Myths & Monsters, vol. 1*, available from her website.

www.angishearstone.com | www.paintedcomics.com

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During REM sleep, the brain prevents you from acting out dreams by producing hormones that temporarily paralyze your body.

Sleep Paralysis occurs when you regain consciousness but the hormones haven't worn off. This happens most often when waking, but can also occur when falling asleep.

Visual and auditory hallucinations often accompany the experience, since your brain hasn't fully stopped dreaming. This has led many to believe something supernatural is involved.

Attempting to wiggle your fingers or toes often helps bring the episode to an end.

Despite its frightening effect, this phenomenon is not harmful.

Sleep Well...

david lean, part 1

or, i wonder why she thinks my journal is postmodern
by Greg Brown

(enter room, tracking shot, follow feet of narrator)

we sit 3am
in the waffle house
as one should only visit the waffle house at 3am
ordering
1 coffee
1 vanilla flavored coke
1 waffle
1 order of hash browns: scattered smothered and covered

i bring out my journal and try to speak of david lean
that's so postmodern
she replies

the journal or david lean

as she pours her waffles
i notice that the color of the butter almost
matches the dingy yellow of the floor

why is there a hole in the journal she asks
the point of view changes
and i realize that we are
never going to talk about david lean

(low angle facing up)

is it the hole that makes it so postmodern i ask
further hiding the flavor of the waffles she pours the syrup
evenly washing over buttered ridges
square by square

i lose myself in the syrup wondering
why my mother never made molasses cookies
did your mother ever make molasses cookies
i ask as she is still pouring her syrup

what
how is your mother
what
hows your mother
fine do you know my mother
no did she ever make molasses cookies
what
never mind

(wide angle from overhead)

the syrup and the waffles
are done
and my hash browns are cold and untouched
and i still havent asked her about david lean.

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