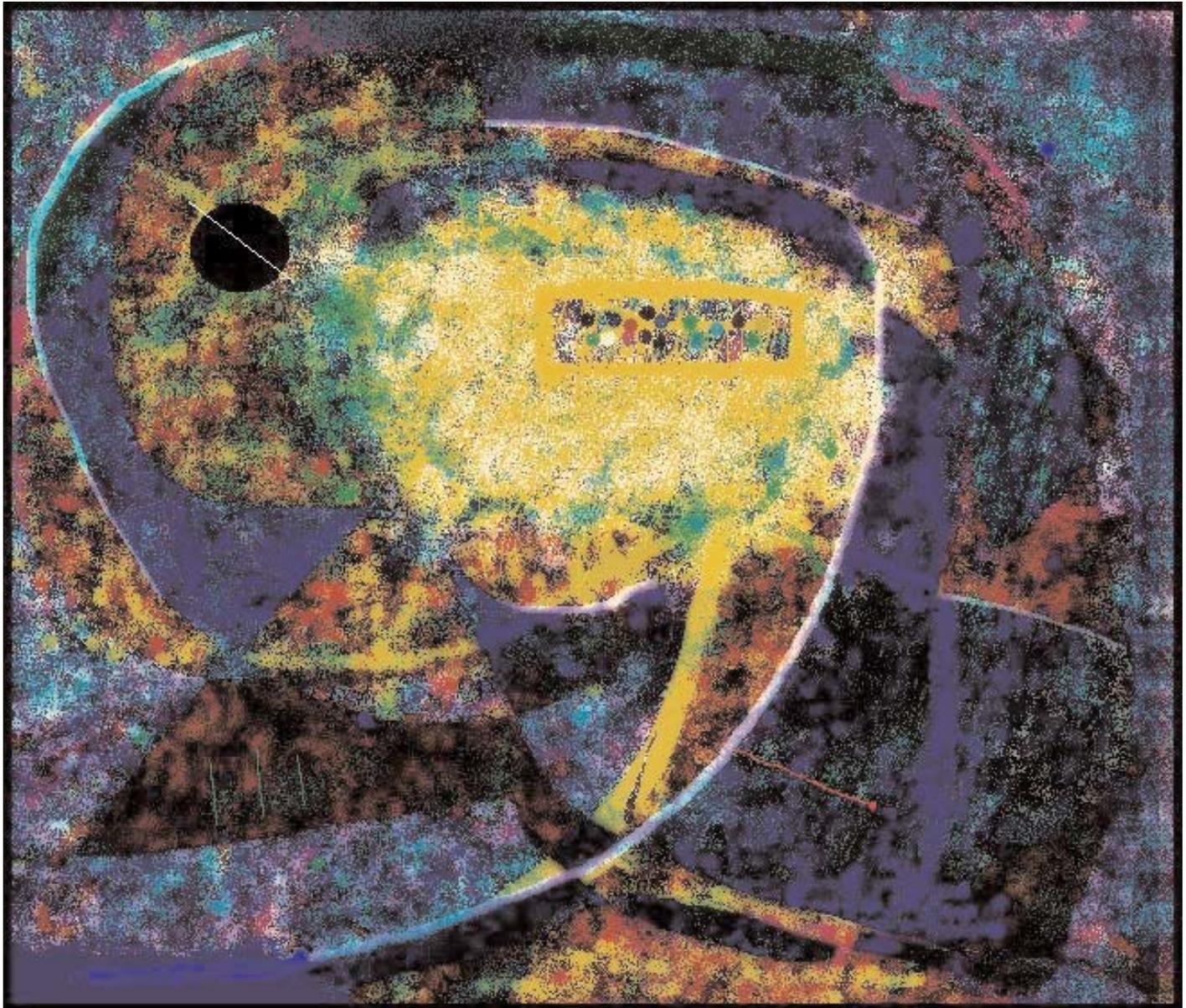


Something for every taste: electronic eye-candy by Peter Schwartz; how sweet the prosody of David Schwartz, Ayanda Abeke and Abbey Reese; all of the holiday spice with David McLean, S. P. Flannery and Ashok Niyogi; and The Dream Journal.

The Blotter

DECEMBER 2007 MAGAZINE



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"Sight"

I've never had my palm read, nor investigated the dregs at the bottom of my cup of tea. Like many of you, I've never felt the need to investigate the details of my life from those angles. Recently, I've even left off the daily news and weather reports from my datafiles, for they are ravenous for one's time and exhaust precious ergs of mental energy. Instead I've been keeping to the broader paths. I can see my future as clearly as I need to. The key points are as follows: in some days to come, I expect to experience the vast humility of publishing a book, in which a heretofore valid and fragile part of my soul is bared and after brief analysis is found wanting, with little more fanfare than an, "oh, well." Also in the not-too-distant mist I see myself having conversations with young men who want to marry one or the other of my daughters, while subduing my native instinct to stealthily eliminate them from the homo-sapiens DNA pool. Further down the pathway of my life, I will lose some of my capacity for reading, writing, talking, listening, working and playing, with some level of my frustration with this evolution to be borne by my wife, who is patient and kind despite my proclivity for constantly grating away at her last nerve. I will be placed under an opium-based pain-blocker some day, while simultaneously losing effective control of my GI, and suspect that my biochemistry will react as many before have, with a rousing *yee-haa* and a subsequent and corresponding *oh, crap*. And I will experience that ineffable, slippery-slope series of occurrences that removes me from the mortal coil. Surely, all of these moments will be singular but, as I have said, expected.

So just when I think I may never again experience anything novel, it turns out I am wrong. While my life has been a vast prairie of time; schedules, responses and responsibilities whirling like dust-devils in the past, and the editor/scribbler/at-home-fatherand husband future as fog-smearred as a windshield during the early morning commute, this month of my fiftieth birthday has been an interesting tick on the clock. Noteworthy enough, perhaps, to try and relate them to you.

In the gentle last days of Indian summer, I took the girls to the park. While they jungle-gym'd, I sat reading on a nearby bench. In the distance, over in the public rose garden, I heard what sounded like a boom-box, or someone thumping irritatingly on a drum. But when the girls followed the noise, hesitant and curious, I followed, expecting that I would soon have to take them by the hand and lead them away. But there in the fragrant corner of the garden, under a gazebo, to the pulse of a young man pounding away on a djembe, were kids playing at *capoiera*. Half dance and half martial sport. Eye contact, but no physical blows. Hands and feet directing the partners/combatants. Through swinging legs and arms, spinning bodies, jumping and ducking, beauty. A girl sang in Portuguese the refrain, "Capoiera, capoiera!" My daughters sat, criss-cross-applesauce, entranced, their small bodies twitching with urgency to join this fresh rhythm and motion. I sat too, sufficiently away that I might not be a hovering parent, but close enough to be surrounded by the noise and whirl. At first I frowned – my mind dredging up what it knows about capoiera: developed by slaves in Brazil as a way to learn combat skills. Then, instead of analyzing, I entered the moment that my daughters were able to possess so simply. The music was loud and not my style, but I didn't care. The participants were very young, but they didn't judge me, sitting on the edge of a rosebed; and I no longer judged them. It became an *ah-ha* moment, where my self-satisfied rigidity was cracked by the discovery.

One afternoon I listened to a friend telling me about his work. Corporate video. A "shoot" this week, returning to do "B-roll" the following Monday. Hey, would I like to come along? My eyebrows went up, thinking about what I had to do, groceries and daddy-driver and house-chores. Also, I felt...*tired*...with all things business, even semi-interesting business. Compromising, I offered that I couldn't make the shoot, the one with the executive interviews, but perhaps I might do the other one. Early Monday morning, I followed his directions. South, into farm country. Tall hurricane fences surrounded hills and trees. A quiet breeze shook the oak leaves which were dis-

appointingly skipping fall colors to go directly to brown. A smell in the air, unusual, primal, raised the hairs on the back of my neck. The B roll of this corporate video, it turned out, was of tigers. Burning bright. Live, full-blown and in your face, tigers. They had names on their enclosures, and personalities, but these were not pets, not "zoological displays". Nor were they Hollywood stunt-tigers for any Temple of Doom movie. The guide/host, three fellows in the production team, my friend and I were escorted onto the preserve to see the big cats that had been from ill-planned pethood and private zoos. Because it was not a regular "tour" we had a different access to the creatures, more intimate, and for myself, unique. One tiger was a big-daddy of seven hundred pounds, larger, it was explained to me, than a typical wild male. I stared, not wanting to blink, wishing to capture this in my deepest memory. I ached, rotating my shoulders, flexed my legs one after another, trying to get them to relax. Perhaps it was instinct, long lost in my suburban soul, making me want to run, hide from this king, this *emperor*. Still, I had no idea. As I talked to my friend, thanking him for this opportunity to have accompanied the crew, the tiger, who had wandered away from the fence, turned. I looked over to see a full-grown tiger charging full speed towards me. I couldn't see, or perhaps just couldn't remember the fence between us. There was only the orange and black, the ivory glint, the crackle in his eyes. If I could have run, I might have made it to my car before my heart exploded in my chest, before I went mad with fear, but like a thousand-thousand humans before me I stood helpless before teeth and claws. I gasped and the big guy suddenly pulled up short and touched the fence tentatively. Later I was told that he liked to play this way. He had a kittenish sense of humor. It turns out, our host said, that tigers don't like the bouncy, unsteady feel of the chain-link fence, so they never try to climb them. Good to know, I thought. Now, I have this memory, this short, personal piece of video, if you will, of being attacked by a tiger. How many people can say that?

A friend of ours is in the hospital, has been there for the past three weeks. Her chronic illness required a procedure which led to an infection, and the situation is so dire that the doctors have disengaged her kidneys and GI so that they may be allowed to heal. My wife goes to the hospital often, to spell our friend's husband so that he can rest. I stay with the girls, and think about how this turn of events has changed our friends' lives. She and her husband have a little boy and a baby girl and I can't stop thinking about them and feeling helpless and shattered and angry because she is their mother and those children need her. My wife tells me not to think about that, but I can't make my brain work like that, cannot just turn off a thought. What I know, what I have been told, is if the infection can be stopped, if her body can heal itself, then she will be home by Christmas. This thought - of being home by Christmas - is something we all have read before, something that pierces through our hard crusts; the hopeful refrain of the tired soldier in a hopeless situation. I want to put stock in it. I really do.

Three moments in a single month, as rare as hen's teeth. Chances are that's it for a while. Rather than hoping for more, I will dedicate myself to the moments in between, that no oracle can divine, no newspaper cares to announce. We spend precious time arguing about small potatoes, worrying about fair representation, watching celebrities do normal and foolish things, accusing each other, letting job woes paralyze us, suffering pain in private. We fear for our climate, and rather than joining a global-warming-awareness club and making friends with like-minded folks, we strut and fret upon the stage. We are troubled, and instead of moping about the imperfections of the myriad choices available to us for soothing the soul, we might choose any port in the storm, find the human touch. There is only one point to being, one measure of success and it is love and I have not loved my girls enough, my family enough, or my friends enough.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

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CAUTION

My aunt, who was a member of the Junior League and is over eighty years old told a joke recently in which she used the word "tallywhacker". No kidding. "Tallywhacker". How funny is that?

“Rama ben Dama”

by David Schwartz

Rama was simply startled and simply amazed to hear two of his goats carrying on a conversation in the middle of the field in the middle of the day. Rama was a simple man. Though he was not an educated man, he knew enough of his own language to identify the conversation as taking place in his own language, in his own field. Rama knew enough of his own language to express simple surprise and simple amazement in simple terms. Which he did.

Unbeknownst to him, the conversation he was listening to was taking place between two neighborhood children who were sitting lazily in the downside slope of a grassy knoll, discussing what they would do if and when they graduated from school.

“I,” announced the first child with great pomp and ceremony, for he was quite convinced he would graduate school and go on to do great things, “I shall go to England. Then I shall go to France. I shall learn many languages

and practical skills, and return here to teach my oppressed brothers and sisters.”

How wise a goat I have raised, thought Rama.

The second child said he was going to go to America, get a good paying job, work diligently, and forget all about this stupid country, these stupid people, and his stupid, stupid brothers and sisters.

What a selfish, arrogant goat I have raised, thought Rama.

Runi Duni, a noted criminal, was passing across the field at that particular time and saw Rama raise one hand with a joyous expression, and then raise the other with a gloomy look. Runi Duni watched the herder repeat his action a dozen times, and grew very, very anxious. He was not anxious because he was a famous criminal. Criminals in these parts were not what we, in our country, would call criminals. They were more like lawbreakers.

Runi Duni was finding it very difficult to ply his trade. That was why he was anxious. Everyone in town was aware of his trickery and deceit and avoided him. He did not mind the fact that no decent people wanted to be his friends, but he was very, very upset that they did not want to be his victims. He was finding it more and more difficult to make a living, which was ironic because he now felt more and more like he had to eat. But eating was as impossible without money in his country as it is in our own.

“Ho, friend,” he interrupted, “What are you doing,”

“I am thinking about my goats, said Rama. “My one goat claims

he will go to England and elsewhere to learn skills to bring back to the other goats. My second goat says he will go to America and become rich. I have one good goat and one wicked goat.”

“The second goat has the smarter plan,” Runi Duni said. He thought so simple a goatherd an easy target, and was deep in thought about how he might compel Rama to give up some money. He had not clearly formulated a plan when he said, “Look here, friend. I will give you a clear example of skilled reasoning why I think the goat who wants to go to America has the better plan.”

“Please do,” said Rama.

Meanwhile, the lads who were hid beneath the grassy hill ran home for dinner. Runi Duni told Rama he would propose a riddle, and if Rama could answer the riddle correctly, the goat who wanted to go to England and return with skills would be proven right. If Rama could not answer the riddle, the goat who wanted to go to America would be proven correct.

Rama did not exactly understand the reasoning behind the wager, for a wager it was, for Runi Duni had added that whoever was proven correct should pay the other a goodly sum. Nevertheless, Rama thought there must be some city knowledge behind the wager, even though Runi Duni was careful not to say how much a ‘goodly sum’ was. Nor did it matter. Runi Duni intended to fluster Rama terribly, make him forget what he was thinking, and blubber forth a reply which had little to do with anything and nothing at all to do with the issue at hand.

“So, here’s the riddle. You, being a farm boy, should know the answer to this one. If I were smarter, I would have picked a better riddle to test you with, but I know fewer riddles than



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I have intelligences. Anyway, what is the sum of twelve sheep if four sheep are taken away from the herd?"

This was a terribly perplexing question for Rama, for he was a goat herder and knew next to nothing about sheep. Nor was he a chicken rancher, either, but he hatched a wonderful plan to help him win the bet. He decided he would ask his goats for the answer to the riddle. Which he did. He could not tell, however, whether the goats had answered "bleep," or "feighhh." To compound matters, the goats had apparently relapsed into a language he did not understand. On the other hand, the goats evidently agreed that Rama did not understand their answer, for they began discussing the issue between themselves. Rama might have stopped to wonder how wonderful his goats were, taking the question so seriously and debating back and forth for the appropriate answer, but Runi Duni was chattering in his ear.

"Don't think about childhood diseases from four years old, or five or six. They are not part of the equation. And don't think about gallons of milk, not seven, or eight or nine, for they are irrelevant to the answer. And surely you need not think about the haze which hangs fourteen, twenty, seventy days around Mount Ma'ruta," and other chatter until Rama thought his ears and whatever connected them together could stand no more. Rama walked some distance from Runi Duni, who let him go, seeing that he would not settle the terribly difficult riddle even if he had complete and utter silence. The man, after all, talked to goats!

When night fell, for it was evening time, Rama had touched each of his fingers several times and experimented with a number of solutions to the riddle. Runi Duni had been looking for Rama and, finding him, begged the answer. Rama, however, had fallen fast asleep. Runi Duni looked at the exhausted herder and said, "Well, there's no money to be made here. That's for sure." But at least he had had a good meal while Rama was away from his goats. Furthermore, he was fairly certain he had eaten the wiser of the two.



"Soul Dialogue" by Ayanda Abeke

Your strong headedness cannot help the situation at hand here, you brat! There is no community without union of human beings; else it's an animal world. And mind you, an individual cannot answer to us neither we, a collective pronoun.

Look, many of us have been here long before the birth of the parents of your parents; still we remain on track of the human race awaiting your seemingly wonderful, fantastic and fabulous birth. We, the aged of the world, drank the life-water overlapping from mountain top down the valley ages before your fore-fathers. But since we, the aged of the world, have decided to charm you right from your mother's womb as to concur to our request before birth. We really don't have a choice other than to execute this shameful task bestowed on us. And we hope our discussion with you on human wants be favourable. Although, human wants are insatiable, as affirmed by great economists, yet, we hope to get more than satisfaction from you because you are our baby.

It might interest you that for days and nights, we, the royal bards, palace jesters, community chanters and sages, have been writing and rewriting vivid words in lines and stanzas, in lyrical free-verse, and ballad formats. Under the aged big-fat sacred tree, Iroko, in the courtyard have we had sleepless nights and restless days. This itinerary started almost immediately after the towncrier's pronouncement of your coming at the village-square. There gathered young, mid-aged and old clans of the city, at the summons of your father, his royal highness, through his voice-carrier (gbo-n-ka: Gbonka). Young and up-live-coming world citizen, don't nurse unnecessary fear, go ahead and fill your heart with boundless ecstasy, because here will definitely be a soothing place to live. We have composed bulks of lines and stanzas with a series of lullaby themes that could instantly put you to sleep, whilst some of the ballads narrate several legendary stories and folktales. No, don't tell me you also like fairytales, I already know that beforehand, they're children's favourites. And alone for your listening pleasure, old ones have been restructured and newly written. O, my

heart was filled with joy when the folksingers and the dazzling orchestra promised their best in accomplishment of the stories and tales, in their ancient attire.

(Wow! That's great and fantastic! The womb-child exclaimed with excitement.)

You are welcome. The question you mean? Don't bother yourself on that. All right, I will tell you. It was on the last day of the week, gathered your father's wives in the palace after his official meeting with the council of chiefs on relevant matters towards the development of the village. There they all sat before his royal highness chatting and, suddenly, your hunchbacked mother cleared her way to the front, marching on her senior wives rudely. And on her admission to the front she pronounced your pregnancy with her hands akimbo. She said: his royal majesty's baby in my womb is a month and a few days old. Silence dominated the palace for seconds before the king stood and embraced her with exhilaration...in fact, that was what delayed your coming and made it a tedious one. How? Since your father became the king of the land, quite twenty moons ago, we had not had cause to eat, drink or rejoice in a baby's honor in this palace in the least. And this was the basis of his flitting from one woman to another and flirts around with others like the hunter's dog. We, the executive council of chiefs, were only in the know of others. Yet, Osun, the goddess of fertility who blesses wombs with bliss, never blessed their wombs. And your poor mother, who was part of the yearly gifts from small-neighborly villages few moons ago, became blessed without an oracle consultation. Instead for her to spread her hands wide on the germinated yam and eat it in silence, no she didn't, she left it open before her co-wives and...the result. Alas! I got the wisdom behind your proverb. The reason why they kept me here for extra two years. You are right.

My dear up-live-coming citizen, do not be angry and make no vows that might never come to pass. Your pitiful mother would have carried you for the rest of

The Blotter

her life if not for the interference of the oracle priest and witches of the world. They were the reason why your mother is in the labour room now. Anyway, you have fewer problems to bear on your fragile shoulders, since your father, the physical and spiritual leader of this imbalanced territory, had been told by world oracle priests, perhaps, your sex, the food, colour of clothes, and type of drink, these are your dos and don'ts. Your fate: either good or bad...but not when you'll beyond doubt die. The rest of the life riddle you have to find out yourself because life is more than a world and battle front. Yes, the rest you would find out if you ever come to life at all. Why? What did you mean by if I ever come to life? I was just being realistic. At times, sage's statements take time to be unfolded. Patience is required at this juncture because one does not lick hot soup in a hurry. Gently. Very soon my dear Earth-coming-child you shall understand what existence and death entail. But....

Oldest citizen of the world, would you save me the stress of thinking or do I say brainstorming in order to unravel sense in your logical statements! Would you speak in a plain language before I change my mind?! O, you dare rave at me, you brat! Who the hell do you think you are? You don't want to drink from the cold, hot and warm water of this place called earth, the fifth of the planets, before asserting your authority? Like father like son. It means that you are not a bastard despite your mother's sexual atrocities. Wolf-whistle is the exact word. We don't expect anything less. Surprise does not have a place here; you're just being real and natural, in fact, a true child of your lineage. Go ahead and change your mind. Change

your sex from female to a male to become your garrulous father's dearest and upgrade your mother's position in the palace as the bearer of the heir. Change from male to a female child and render your entire lineage ineffectual. Or what other mind have you to change than your sex? Your characteristic pomposity is unchangeable! In reality, it is beyond your control.

The "me alone" idea that made your great fore-fathers eat and eat until they started vomiting through their nostrils, which led to their ill-timed parting with earth. In the least, it's not new. Their successor gave birth to your great grandfather, who graduated from "me alone" ideology within my reach but proceeded to subjugation of innocent closet with aid of horrific ammunitions and cunningness (or craftiness). The angle your immediate grand-father came from is quite narrow with his ideology, which is the "amalgamation of oppressed territories." This particular ideology was acclaimed as the height of exploitation by the world's humanitarian citizens. But your father's "global-village" ideology congested the whole world. This idea of stealing via networked cables through nodes and satellite is the most synchronized.

It is certain that you're convinced though confused that I know virtually everything about your truculent lineage. And one thing I want you to take cognizance of is the sequential progression of your lineage. Either good or perhaps bad, that's your ordained lineage. Tell me now, the unborn controversial citizen of the world, that you would not trod the pathway of your parents. Convey a promise through me now, that in your reign shall people of the world have equal right; nations shall

love fellow nations and hatred shall be trash in the dustbin. Tell me to tell them, the world citizens, that racial discrimination; extortion and exploitation shall in entirety be shipped complete from the coast of the living to the shore of the deepest volcano.

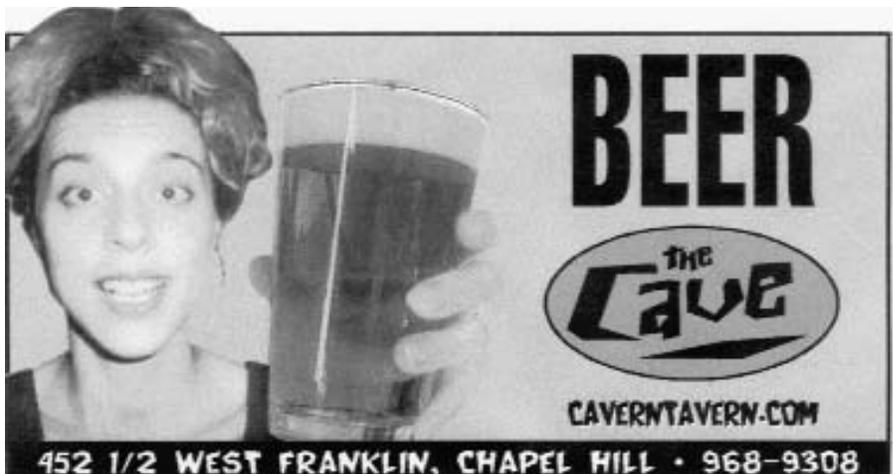
Indeed, you know much about the world: the First to the Second World War; the first to the second gulf war and the several civil wars. Young one, if that is a guess, may I say you guess right. My existence here is longer than how long I can brilliantly recollect. Fine. Then, why don't you allow me the chance to get out of this inner world before your mouth widening requests. Shut your untutored mouth this instant! Young ones don't talk to elderly ones like that. Ours is a cultured society, Africa. People of your calibre must give optimum respect to fellows of my status. And if you continue like this with me, it means I cannot guarantee your seeing the light of the earth. Because I was chosen from one of the cool headed in the elders' league of the world to have a tete-a-tete with you on our needs and demands as you'll surely succeed your unscrupulous father. This was done after countless campaigns and open-ballot elections at the village-square. My counterpart had thought that he would win the election, for him to have this golden moment spent with you...but "if lies run faster than the fastest rocket in the world, one day would truth surpass it." I never believed I could win the election, yet, I believed in my self, which was the source to my winning.

Come, yes, come closer; cling your left-side ear to my lips and be attentive to the whisper: "it was one of your lineage entourages, servants, bards and jesters who contested against me." You know



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what it means for him to be here instead of me, I guess. My age and trust bestowed upon me by the world elders, I cannot betray. Those things I asked you were not sheer requests or promises but necessary terms for your prompt existence! Just concur to them all and you shall be in our midst in the next...

Pity old citizen of the world! In less than thirty minutes my mum would be out of the labour room; ironically; in a jiffy I will be wining and dining with you lots! O, what a pity: the young do not understand the efficacy of a medicinal-concoction and call it vegetable. Go on ranting, raving and let's see who wins this race. Strong headed new-comer, peep through the blown navel of your mother's tummy if you can or perhaps through the pointed nipples of her soft; milky bossom to visualize her present standing point. What a mess! Nonsense! How do you mean world's newest-comer? You mean that our private conversation is being televised live and direct to the entire citizens of the world via world television stations: CNN and BBC!? Not really. But child, you mean you see all that? Yes! You must have seen more than shown. Or maybe you peeped through the wrong channel? Well, we are on the local scene, in fact, in the most remote area. But how come you were able to see the sky, miniature satellites mounted on our spaces without our consent? We never see them ourselves in the first place but it was when they begin to tell our stories more than we can, then and only then we question their source and we got know this fact...but. Would you stop peeping, this instant! And tell me now that it was not through the second unauthorized option you peeped through. Of course, that was the channel I implored. How dare you!? Alas, old citizen, you

hadn't restricted me from any of the options given. However, what effect do the placards project? You mean: "condom is the only good thing out of HIV/AIDS scheme;" IMF is the Third World countries economic enemy;" "literacy is not confined to the classroom, third world clan-folks are not illiterate;" "subtle amalgamation of races is a crime against humanity;" "everyone is born equal, right ought to be equal;" etc. Yes, you are right. And thanks for the last two additions. Don't mention, it's just the barrier; we are of the same world. Hummm, to answer your questions, I think those phrases blink truth. No, I think they are all bloody lies. Yes...no...I think...you'll have to find out the truth yourself. Wait a minute newcomer, your father's closest friend once conveyed to me in confidence that: HIV/AIDS is targeted at putting birth populations of Third World citizens under control. And from a reliable source, IMF was said to be the new International Ministry of Finance, solely for the benefit of the developed citizens. Exploitation of the poor to enrich the rich. O, what a cruel world. The continued existence of the strongest. You have to be strong in terms of everything for you live in this battle-field world!

It's all over now, new-comer, now you know the task before you. A yes would lead you down here and start execution of the task almost immediately. Hmm, what a pity. Divide and rule. Survival of the fittest. Paupers' sweat to enrich the rich. It's indeed a bad world but I have no choice than to concur in order to come on earth and make a difference! No matter how little or minute, my contribution is needed and important if I really get you right. Yes!



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

A variation on the old standard "chase" dream – this one through a college campus, through a science library, and through night-time residential suburbia. This time I am on foot, running in my jeans and nikes through a summer-afternoon field of blackberry brambles. The strength in my legs and arms makes me over-confident, so that by the time I hit the campus, running through leaf-shaded avenues, I am running among the automobiles. One fellow is not watching where he is going, or where I am going, and I jump up on the hood of his convertible and go defiantly over the top, like Michael J. Fox skateboarding through Back To The Future. This makes him, quite naturally, angry, and he confronts me, but I shout him down with threats of using my newfound physical strength. As I continue through the school buildings, even climbing library-shelf ladders, I see that he has hired fraternity boys to chase me. They aren't anyone I know, but they look like people I should know – I should remember from my own college days. When they surround me outside, I take a tree branch and pummel them, running away before the police arrive. Then it is night – I am now being pursued by the law and dodging between shadows. I find that I wish I could remember why I went running to begin with.

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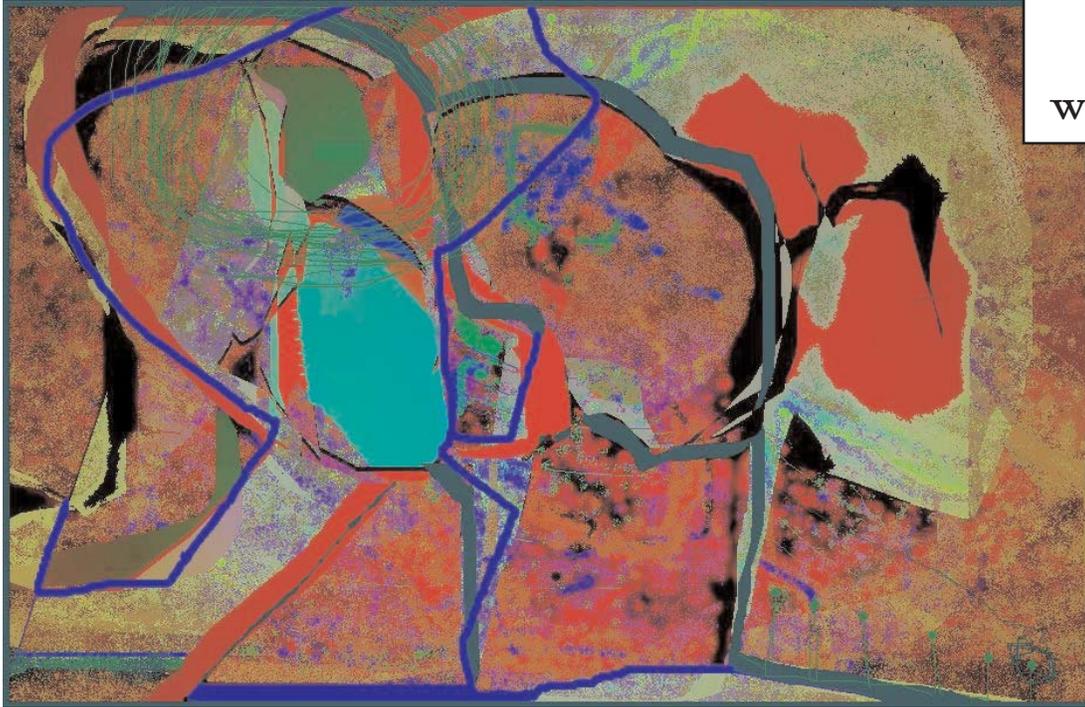
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and learns the paths
of machines

learns the difference
between stars and
satellites and how
the streetlights echo

just so when the
gutters fill with heart-
ache from last night's
hangover party

whose uninvited
learned to read a few
more signals through
the half dead pulse

of the telephone
despite the static
now roaming the city
like a cloud of bees

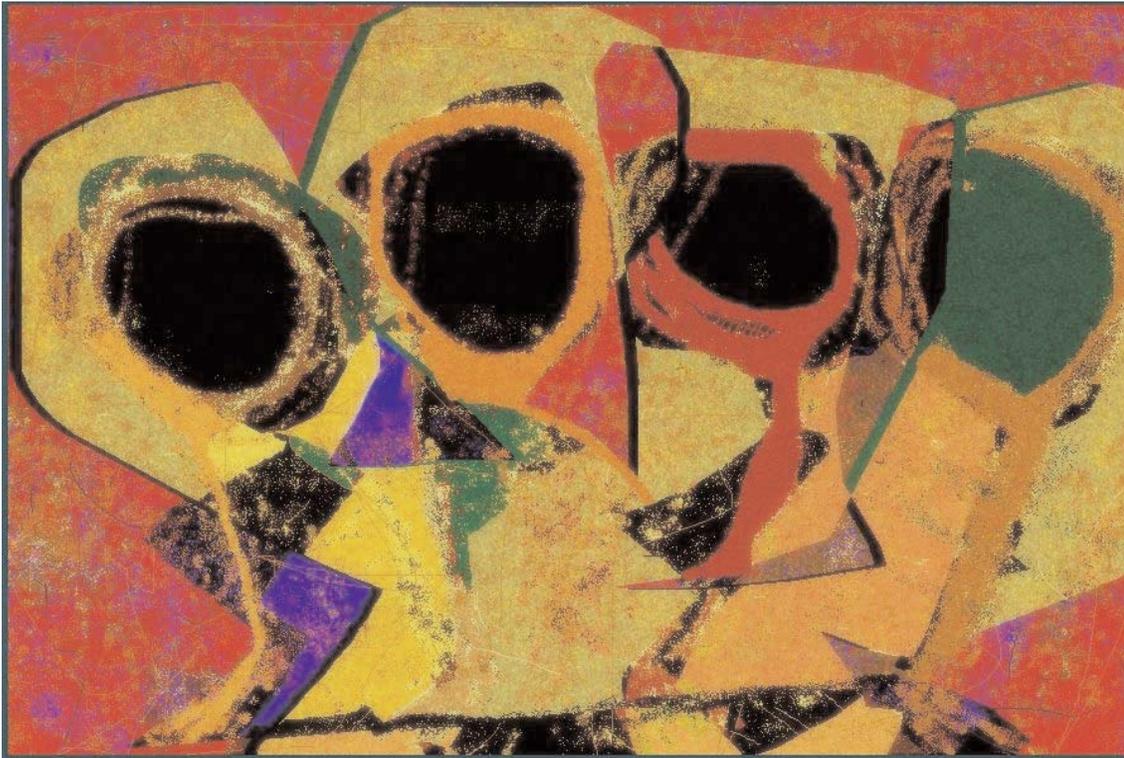
broken from the hive
hungry even for the
bittersweet scent
of mere memory

when something
like midnight once
grabbed conscience
by the neck

and squeezed
until the automatic
blacked out leaving
just one last

lonely parking lot
of resistance.





Upper left:
Metabolism

Upper Right:
Saturdays

Lower Left: The
Secret Industry

Lower Right: The
Human Show



"To and Through"

by Abbey Reece

My iceberg is just big enough that I have space to walk in small circles. I can see the backs of whales in the distance. A seal lights onto my little chunk of ice, looks at me, then slips back into the water.

My fingers are numb; I'm shivering. I have not even a coat or a scarf. I decide to start a fire using pages from my unfinished novel to un-numb my fingertips.

I re-emerge from my igloo with my manuscript that is 95% complete and lay it down outside. I scruffle them all up and look at them lying there. They can sense what's about to happen. I feel all the different letters and punctuation marks squirm with all their might to set themselves free. ["It's no use," I say.]

They blazed brilliantly, but hardly long enough for what I needed. The typewriter will have to go, as well.

The girl who gave it to me had helped me edit my writings. It was a special gift and we loved each other. I had always feared that she thought what I wrote stupid. "No, I don't think that at all," she would say.

The work was long and laborious, moving sentence by sentence, word by tedious word through my manuscript, and working on it night after night till 4 in the morning was bound to lead to intense, dirty sex.

By the time my manuscript was in tatters, looking shot up by a machine gun, we'd fucked at least a hundred times.

But love or no, I was cold. I crashed the thing down on the ice and kicked it. It went scattering across the ice, turning circles, slowly stopping where I'd burnt up my ill-written manuscript. The

bar returned on its own, as though I were about to type a new sentence.

Are typewriters flammable? Yes. They have fuel in them; that's how they work.

No. They're not flammable. That's not how they work; they have ink and stink to high heaven if set a-fire.

It was a learning experience.

A whale let out a big toot.

When one finds himself on an iceberg at sea, he will find also that time melts away and becomes fluid, mushy. For instance, when he sees a small twig of what-not, seaweed, we'll say, floating off in the distance, he will realize after having watched it for a while, that he doesn't know the amount of time that has elapsed . . . because time has slowed down to a grinding halt. While he watches this small twig of seaweed floating hither and tither, he will, seeing how he's faced with almost certain death, begin to day-dream about life as it used to be, while the water swishing to and fro creates a drone-like effect . . .

By the time the twig of seaweed has finally floated out of view, the observer will have lost all sense of time and space - space also, because there's nothing to gauge space by any longer on an open sea - of past and future, of what's his truly ugly destiny. He will then try to awaken himself, to summon himself from the oblivion of past dreams he's fallen into and re-grip the present moment. He will try to be a man and take control. But he will utterly fail because there's nothing to do to take control. He's drifting on a God-forsaken slab of ice in the arctic sea, going nowhere, for Christ's sake. What's he to do? Jump off? At this point he has

to give himself up, through defaulted circumstance, to the vast void of happenstance.

I was deadened, waning, losing energy. I saw my typewriter, seared, lying in the long burned out mound of ashes and soot that was once my book. Not only had fear run its course with me, but stupidity as well. Why in fuck's name did I burn up my typewriter and book? If I'm stranded here till death, wouldn't it have made it a wee easier if I could've left a fuckin' note behind? Wouldn't that have at least calmed my uneasy nerves? What was I to do? Write a note in the ice? Unlikely. What would I have used, my teeth? My bare bones, once my flesh had hung, swung, and dropped from them?

But what this would've called for, on second thought, would not have been a note, but a set of memoirs, actually. A document of some sort describing my struggles, so that in some sense, some part of me would've remained after my carcass was frozen in a block of ice. If I had had my typewriter and plenty of paper at my disposal, I could've written a very moving account of all that had happened to me of late, a beautiful, stirring work that would've brought tears to the eyes of the young women who would've read it. I could've fictionalized a few episodes where I had to wrestle a shark or something. I could've had myself put in a predicament where I had to sever my own arm to escape entrapment between two icebergs. I could've had a footnote on how I fashioned a salt-extractor for purifying ocean water using only a thread from my shirt and a zipper. But for that to be believable, I'd have had to've done some research, and this was an even bigger wish, because, to ask for one's typewriter to magically reassemble itself after having been smashed and burned was one thing, but to ask for a research library on a small glacial sheet of ice is another.

"God, will you please grant this wish to me. I thank you in advance for having already heard and answered it, for having already commanded several legions of angels to descend here to reassemble my typewriter and bring some ink and several stacks of paper.

"God, even if I faint and fall over from fatigue, lack of food or warmth, I only ask for this so that when my skeleton is found, they will see that one of my finger bones was still trying to peck a last character on a last page. And so that my book will otherwise be finished and will be resting beneath a small paperweight of some sort to prevent it's blowing away. The winds out here are ferocious.

"Thank you."

But it was a no-go.



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And anyway, by the time that I realized this wouldn't happen, it had also occurred to me that it would've been harder to write than I first thought. Since there's absolutely nothing to do but await my doom, there's not much of a story - only one's mind running around like a chicken with its head cut off. Aimless, the mind. I worried that I would've written in such a way that would've reflected this - tangential, without thread or meaning. I worried also about the bitterness it would've portrayed. If I wanted twenty-something white girls to read my book, then in some fashion or the other, it would've had to've been 'up-lifting,' a 'success story.' It would've had to've been applicable to the economic or social sphere of the living and would've had to be an inspiration. It would've ideally done this by showing me here, lost at sea in the sub-zero temperature, floating aimlessly, practically without a hope in the world, and would've implied that, 'if he can make it through that, surely I can be less despairing.' Or it would've had in some way or the other entailed a very romantic, yet unsuspecting, love story. But who was I to fall in love with? A fish? I wondered aloud how Shakespeare did it. I realized that this was his greatest feat, writing something like Romeo and Juliet, which ended by the two of those very unfortunate souls dead as door-nails, and out of a misunderstanding, at that. How did he sell it, I wondered. Perhaps he was a better salesman than writer. No one would've accepted such a tragedy from me. I knew it, too, and so I'd given up on my memoir before I even began.

The book that I'd burned centered on a wealthy kid who was miserably terrified of the poor crashing through the door of his home one night while he and his family supped. The father reassured him several times that this would not happen. "We have the government, federal and local, thus the law, in our pocket, son; there's nothing you need to worry about," he said. But he, the son, was still nervous with fear. I made a case. According to my research, this was what the rich kids were afraid of - not monsters or boogie-men, but the poor.

But I had trouble with the ending. I knew one thing for certain, which was that the poor would trample down his family's door one evening as they supped, but I had struggled with the why's and wherefore's. Was it because his father, specifically, was a miserable wretch of a man who'd repressed far too many people for far too long? Or was it because the family represented the cruelty and atrocious unfairness of a system where money is simply handed down, rather than being

evenly redistributed as it should be? In other words, would I emphasize the micro or macrocosmic theme? After I tentatively settled on former, I struggled once again with making the ending more detailed. This was what a rather good friend of mine had suggested after reading a first draft. I didn't know whether they, the poor, would simply burst through the doors of the home and trample them underfoot, unthinkingly, or whether, being fully aware of how monstrous the rich man was, would slowly torture him to death with various torture devices that they had brought along for the occasion. Could they be that organized and patient as a mob? And would they do this to the kid, too? He would, after all, grow up just as miserable. Between these and all the other short-comings, I lost myself and the story after I brought in the government, both local and federal. The very last sentence was this: "The president realized that he'd won the day again as he jacked off to a picture of himself." It wasn't a very good sentence to end a book with and I knew it. And that's why I didn't have a lot of trouble burning the thing up, aside from the fact that I was freezing.

I don't know how much time passed before I saw the three little scientific nymphs floating my way on a small vessel. There was a cabin on the boat that was probably heated.

As they neared, I told them I was freezing and that I needed help.

"You're cold?" She was taunting me.

"Yes . . . it's cold out."

I boarded and realized it was not entirely a 'joy ride.' They were on a mission. They were women who, when they put their minds to something, did it.

"What's going on here?" I asked. There were electronic apparatuses, radars, test-tubes, beakers, and gear everywhere, all covered in panties and undergarments. There was a readout with seismographic designs being printed out, only to scroll off into the sea.

"Why is this paper being printed only to fall into the water, wasted?" I asked.

No answer

"You're trying to communicate your scientific data with the fishes?" This was not very cute, and I knew it. I had desired saying something wittier, but was cold, silly-feeling, and not in rare form. Plus, I wanted to make love to all of them at once so was prone to be foolish.

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No answer, again.

But I must say that, I preferred delaying a beautiful three-some inside the warm cabin till after I found out that we were actually headed somewhere, that we knew where we were going. In light of the pointlessness and helplessness that I found myself in, even sex had lost its appeal.

“Surely you’ve a satellite that communicates with another satellite that communicates with a human somewhere that can help me out of this predicament, right? What good is all this scientific hocus-pocus, otherwise?”

And once again, on this they were all three mute.

I entered their cabin to sleep warm for the first time in days but awoke what seemed only moments later, cold, back in my make-shift igloo. At first I thought the girls had abandoned me but realized that, more likely, I had hallucinated the entire episode. When all hope is lost, fantasy takes over.

Arriving on the much warmer island proved tricky. My iceberg, my home, was melting away slowly but surely in direct ratio to my waning body and spirit. The good thing I took from this was that I was undoubtedly coming into a warmer climate.

By the time I saw the island actually coming into view, my iceberg was an ice cube. Unfortunately for me, I was not much of a swimmer. My parents had tried to introduce this to me when I was young, but I gave it no mind. I thought it useless. My swimming coach rolled her eyes every time she saw me approaching. How was I to know that I’d end up within swimming distance of an enchanted island after having nearly starved and frozen to death, and that my only chance of survival was that I had the skills to swim a few hundred feet?

I had no other choice - I was close enough, I reasoned. I made the sploosh and gave it my all. But immediately, I realized the idiocy of this. I was gurgling, splashing to and fro, as soon as I hit the water.

My head ducked under water . . . I came up gasping for all I was worth . . . then I ducked under again. I’m a goner, I thought. It wasn’t the way I had thought it would end. I went under for the last time, water engulfing my lungs, veins, heart, and brain.

I awoke some time later lying on the beach underneath the stars. It was warm out and there was a nice, gentle breeze blowing in from the ocean.

During my unconsciousness, I dreamed that an angel or mermaid had swam out and saved me. Before she saved me, I dreamed that I was swimming towards a deep abyss in the ocean. What I expected to find at the bottom of the abyss can be said to be a mystery and still be the truth . . .

It was not too unlike the journey of the hopeless schizophrenic who has staked out too hard and long and deep on a journey to the center of his soul . . . or, as a psychologist would put it, his psyche. There are some schizophrenics that do this who cannot be recalled. Their plight never seems hopeful from the spectator’s point of view. Yet, with those that cannot be recalled, the observer is left with no other option than to let him go, praying that he finds what he’s looking for and, more importantly, is able to get back to the top alive - sane. Perhaps what he wants to find is a mythical skeleton key. Perhaps it’s treasure of sorts.

As I was swimming up from the abyss, clutching something in my hands, I began to give out. And that’s when I dreamed of the mermaid angel woman.

Why had she helped me?

I didn’t know . . . and, no matter, anyway.

I looked behind me after hearing a ‘he-he-he’ and realized there were monkeys in the bushes. They were pointing at me, mocking me. I plucked a banana from a tree, peeled it slowly and ate it. A coconut bonked me on the head. Having gained some energy, I decided to rove around.

In the middle of the forest, I found animals with very long necks. They were grasping for leaves and such. Upon realizing that I was there, they maneuvered their necks around trees and stared at me, curious.

Later I saw other creatures that

were only big mounds of dumb flesh - too much physical meat that been wrapped around a single primitive strand of raw nerve. When they saw me they charged, as if I were a threat.

I realized that getting mauled in the ass by one of those things would likely be the end of me, so, to get away, I ran up the mountain - what actually appeared to be a violent volcano - that was just ahead of me. I probably didn’t have to go all the way to the top, but I scare very easily and wanted to assure my safety.

When I reached the summit, I sat down, tired, and stared into the sun until it became the moon. I went to the mouth of the volcano and peered inside. I said things like, “Hello!” down into it, and heard my voice echo: “Hello . . . hello . . . hello.” I dropped a rock down it. I never heard the rock land, and as I looked down there, it seemed I was seeing all the way to the center of the earth. Somewhere down there, somewhere near the core was something that still maintained all the primordial vigor and energy of millions of years past, the beginnings of life, something on par with what exploded and created the entire universe. I then imagined that the entire universe was nothing but a bubble with other bubbles packed tightly around it, like frog larva, or soap suds in a bubble bath. This would explain why the tools that the scientists use to measure the universe would play tricks on them: the rounded sides of our bubble - the universe - would reflect inaccurately, and maybe some of the equipment would see through our universe into another, where there were more than four dimensions. And those universes that had more than four dimensions might send our signals back all topsy-turvy on purpose, just to fuck with the scientists. “Look Borbo, here’s another signal. I’ll put it in this box and wait till we’re fucked up to send it back. They won’t know what the hell’s going on.”

I wondered what would happen if the bubble that is our universe were popped. I suppose it would create a vacuum and the other bubbles would quickly compete for the space we left. Then I wondered what sense there was to be made from all this, all of us little bubble universes floating around together in a bubble pack-like formation. But sense and the need for it is all a by-product of time and space . . . which is tied pretty tightly together with the (four dimensional) universe itself . . . so I guess we’re back where we started.

I returned to the shoreline again. With my finger I drew designs in the sand. At first it seemed I was drawing two separate waves, back to back with one



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another, but then it seemed that they were two different strings, crisscrossing. And since I'm not very good at art, it appeared that they were playing and having fun, not remaining strict, but rather going with their own fancies. It struck me as strange that all those little separate grains of sand and crystals, reflecting inward and outward all at once, seemed to be connected by the very lines that I'd drawn . . . and it seemed to me that all things, brains, tadpoles, shovels, planets, thought, livers, ducks, amoebas, art, ecstasy, fucking, people, civilizations and the entire world at large were nothing other than pure energy, and that energy operates by vibrating, pulsating, moving in waves, thumping itself up and down in crests and troughs, rising and falling, beginning and ending, and etching itself into the ether, into nothingness, the no-thing, the emptiness, into silence, into the back drop that simply is, the backdrop by which we thus know and realize all things . . .

And then, when the water and foam that was cascading in and out seemingly erased my little wave-like formations for all eternity, I laughed aloud.

I started trodding the shoreline. I was walking along the line that separates the land and the water while the first rays of the sun were being cast.

It was neither night nor day. I was neither on the land nor in the water. It seemed that I might fall between the cracks. I didn't care. There were ghosts in this land. It was limbo. It was transitional.

I was going to - or through - something. I was always doing this. It seemed I'd passed through a stew, a solution, a syrup, a potion that had been conceived in a witch's cauldron that swished and swooshed and swirled around. I passed through one dream only to awake in another . . . not one cell of my being was left behind.



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"God's coffers" By David McLean

God is but a footnote
to the story every sparrow sings,
recollecting His mourning
on his arrogant hill;

and words grey work
reflects time's autoaffection,
whiling the futural graves
that elicit our attention

as rapt trees surrender
to their annual holocaust,
remembering Man's fall
in their premature birth

the leaves that sacrifice
their sufficiency of days,
fingering sun's clean meaning
in their green coat of pain

where His hill locks its coffers
under History's stone
the lonely bones
waiting flesh again

on love's ruptured structure,
dismembering remembered plain,
as the future that recedes
to the past that remains

in the tower Man's Son
grew from arrogant hill,
where children flew bannered
history, futural still

the pain that Time stores
in that skeletal hand,
freely sharing the mystery
that last cares for a man,

the worm's loving caress
is that last caring touch,
cosseted death
to decay's sensual lust

as we remember dismembering
love's tired dream,
Dame Kind's kind coffers
to record God's scream,

His trump that plays
as angels angular wake,
love from tremulous grave
and suicide's stake

the succulent nothing
noting the void that surrounds
us, dead as our bodies
dissembling love

the last-lusted coffin
and God's arrogant nothing
His hill that stores that suicide's kill;
though the coffin be empty,

the love lives there still,
God and His lover under that arrogant hill;
a trip to cold Sheol's eternity
but an effort of the will -

the nusus that unites us
is but the Nothing that kills

"Polar Bears"

When dawn ascends her throne,
 I make my escape
 from a transient bed,
 a women I met last night
 by chance in a tavern's
 closing hours where only
 solitary patrons reside
 in dim light and B-side songs,
 shots of Wild Turkey and glasses
 full with Rhinelander lager,
 sedated fear and aggression,
 broke down natural tension
 that prohibited interaction
 between two people unfamiliar
 with each other. We forged
 through thick snow to her room,
 a dive motel for travelers
 to conjoin in winter's darkness;
 we will not cross paths again,
 and if we did perchance, icy
 antagonism would be displayed.

S. P. Flannery

"Invasion"

Asphalt cracks are cleared of debris
 so I can fill them with black liquid
 that will harden and prevent rainwater
 from seeping inside my basement
 when I see ants stream out
 from a miniscule hole revealed.
 I brush them aside repeatedly, but
 too many surface, a subterranean deluge
 that floods my feet, covered by sandals,
 with soldiers to defend the hive,
 bite my reddened skin repeatedly
 until I slide backwards to safety
 to pull a determined one off,
 blood swells into bumps I read
 with fingers that take a can,
 an aerosol of organic repellent,
 extracts of plants repugnant
 to these hymenopterans who
 flee as I spray them and
 the black holes they exit from
 the underground hive, underneath
 the house built over wetlands.

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"Rickshaw"

by Ashok Niyogi

We pedal pilgrims to and fro,
I have a rickshaw.
I am the pilgrims' charioteer,
I am their hobbled horse,
we ferry the devout
from temple to hotel to brothel....

I spice up pilgrimage with anecdote,
I am the champion of the myth.
I monitor avarice in fervor
I am the devotees' devout.

I am linked to priest and pimp,
parking attendants and vote banks
behind overflowing garbage stands,
I am the prince of caravanserai touts.

I negotiate with stray cattle,
immigrant beggars and mutants,
the hovering housefly in sweetmeat shops.

In all this, and in more,
the pilgrim with me,
is witness to the footprints of the lord.

CONTRIBUTORS:

David Schwartz is the author of *A Jewish Appraisal of Dialogue*. Currently a volunteer at Drake Hospital in Cincinnati, Schwartz continues to write. His new book, *Midrash and Working Out Of The Book* is now in stores and online.

Ayanda Abeke of Lagos, Nigeria, is the founder of Remour Networks, an arts and literary online magazine. He was the "October Author of the Month Winner, 2006" on the Association of Young Journalist and Writers' website and humbly refers to himself as an essayist and an aspiring poet.

Peter Schwartz is the editor of 'eye' and the associate art editor of *Mad Hatters' Review*. His artwork can be seen all over the Internet but specifically at: www.sitrahahra.com. His paintings have been published on such sites as HiNgE, Subtle Tea, and Mastodon Dentist. His paintings are in the print journals *Orange Coast Review*, *Whiskey Island*, and the *Louisiana Review* to name a few. He has over 200 poems published in such journals as *Porcupine*, *Vox*, and *Sein und Werden*. His fiction has been published on such sites as *Pindeldyboz* and *Dogmatika*. His last exhibition was through *Aesthetica Magazine* and featured a projection of one of his digital paintings on a busy street in York, UK. Currently he is working on paintings for an exhibit at the Amsterdam Whitney Gallery in Chelsea NYC. Yeah, maybe, but he likes me better.

Abbey Reese writes, "Hi, I just moved to Black Mountain, NC about two weeks ago. I'm submitting this short story, titled 'To and Through.' About me, I'm finishing up a second novel, 'Village Life.' My first was named 'Leake Ave.'" I enjoy the rag - if ya'll need help around here - Black Mtn - with distribution, let me know."
Abbey, we love you right back.

David McLean writes, "I was born in Wales in 1960 though I have lived in Sweden since 1987. In the nineties I had a few poems published in *Envoi*, *Lines Review*, *Poetry Nottingham* and *Understanding*; since I started submitting again a couple of months ago I have been already published in or accepted by *In between hangovers*, *Decanto*, *The Journal*, *Poetry Monthly*, *Poetic Hours*, *The Poetry Church*, *Poet's Letter*, *Awen*, *the Delinquent*, *Brutarian*, *Dawn Treader*, *Sein und Werden*, *Erbacce*, *Parameter Magazine*, *Möbius*, *Static Motion*, *Whistling Shade*, and *Lachryma*. I also have had some poems up in the online version of *Zone mag* at www.zonefornone.blogspot.com, archived with them now, as well as in the online *Sein und Werden* and *Poet's letter* where I was June's poet in residence."
All in all, very cool stuff.

S. P. Flannery writes, "I was born in La Crosse, Wisconsin, and now reside in Madison. My poetry has most recently appeared in *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Free Verse*, *The Alembic*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, and *Stone Table Review*."

Ashok Niyogi is an Economics graduate from Presidency College, Calcutta. He made a career as an International Trader and has lived and worked in the Soviet Union, Europe and South East Asia in the '80s and '90s. At 52, he has been retired for some years and has been cashew farming, writing and traveling. He divides time between California, where his daughters live, Delhi and the Indian Himalayas. He is increasingly involved in his personal spiritual quest and has undertaken serious study of scripture. He has published a book of poems, *TENTATIVELY*, [iUniverse, Lincoln, NE - 1995] and has been extensively published in magazines in the USA, UK, Australia and Canada. Ashok writes about life.

Wait a minute, what's this about cashews?

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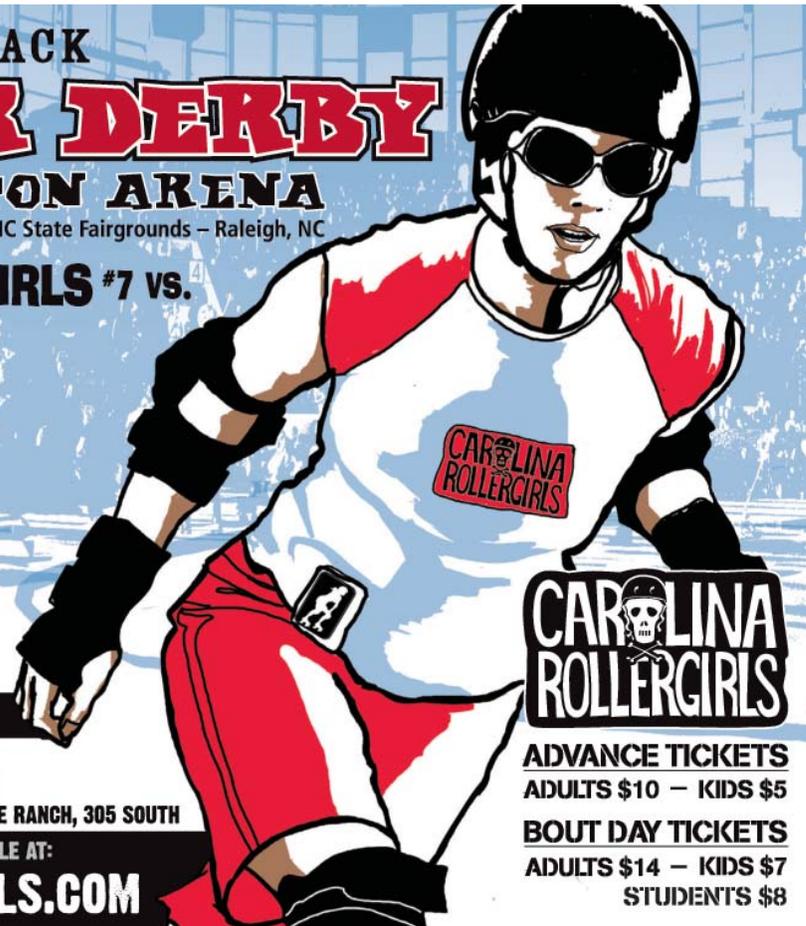
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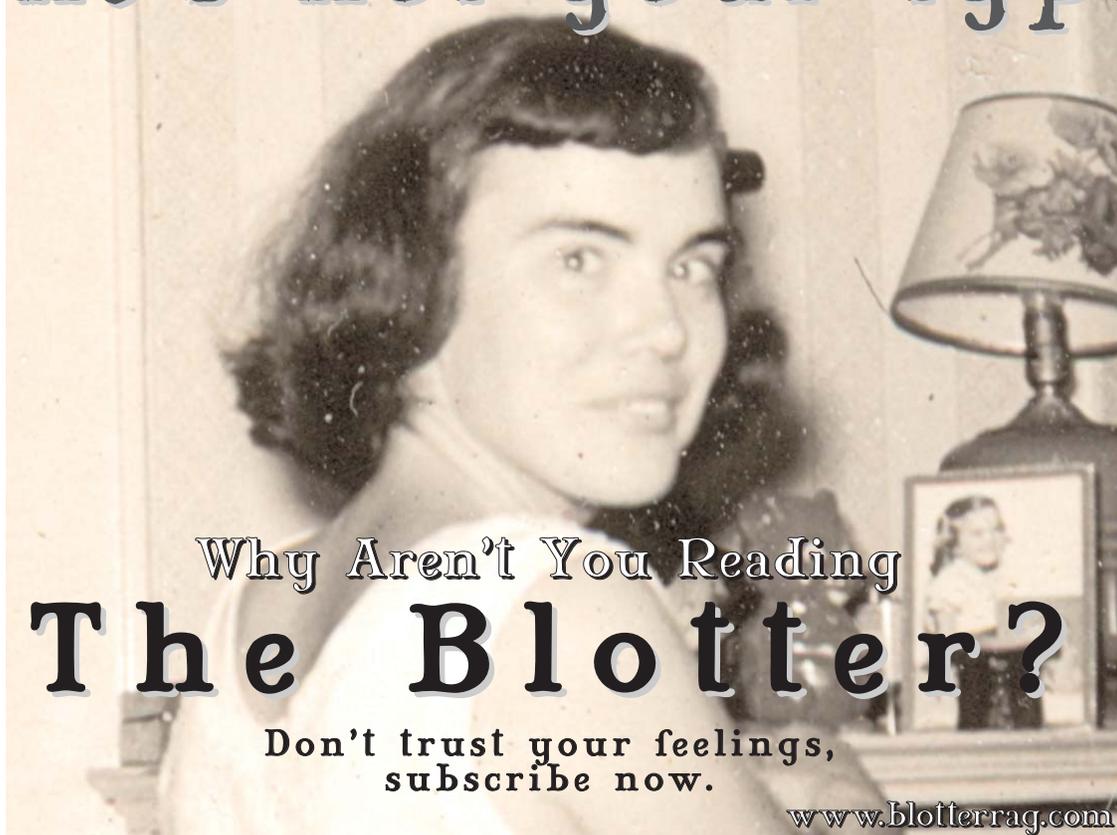
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