

Hey! You got class! "Listen up," shouts Gabriel Ward; "Looke here," say Lori Ballard, Gianna Russo and Casey Porn; "Me first, no me, me!" cry Jason Huskey and Corey Messler; and The Dream Journal.

The Blotter

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MAGAZINE

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Cover art: "New Palm Leaf" by Lori
Ballard - see centerfold for more.

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"A Primer"

We sure like the current format and think it's working pretty well. We receive mail from folks all over the world containing poems and stories and short sections of novels and essays, or files or directions to see files containing paintings or drawings or photographs. This is called "content", which either means the stuff you put inside, or general comfort. We use a three column "format", because five out of six dentists recommend it. Anyhow, we have a cover picture, and some pictures in the middle, because we can only afford half of our pages to be color, and some of those pages are ads. The back page is considered to be a marvelous coup for special advertisers, like concert promoters. Anyhow, there it is; an editorial, a column on someone's recent dream, a story or two, poems and pix. Each ish is laced (like raisins in fresh bread) with the marketing efforts of some local businesses that you should visit. There, a magazine. The paper is mostly recycled pulp. Good for the environment, not so much for our artists. We make do. The ink is vegetable, a point worth discussing, but not here, not now. And you're currently on the editorial page, which also has our masthead. On the upper left are the names of our crew, who each month provide sweat, blood and tears (thanks, Mr. Churchill) to ensure that you get your Blotter. That's me on top (tee-hee).

That's Marty's e-mail address. Don't send him "complaints" or "submissions"; those go to me, and while we're on this subject, don't send me complaints and submissions in the same note - it's confusing and often I want to publish the wrong one. Send Marty money, and ads, and little thank you notes. He likes those.

That's our Jenny's e-mail address just above mine. She's busy reading and has no time for foolishness. I don't know why I wrote "business hours only". It's not like I answer the telephone when I don't feel like it. Hey, I've done my stint in customer service, and you have to confront old habits dead-on and face them one day at a time. So our putting a phone number there is what we refer to in the business as a "formality".

I read every press release we receive, but frankly we don't have room in our format to print them. So although we make fun of releases, we do understand the importance of marketing, and are sympathetic to the overworked and underpaid Public Relations specialists out there. Keep up the good work, gals and guys!

We call this "Information". Here at the Blotter, we used to have a Minister of Information back in the days before we became a republic. This particular information is about the cover art, but it could just as easily be instructions on your next assignment, Mr. Phelps. So pay attention.

Copyright is serious stuff, pards. Our artists and authors retain rights, and permit us to print one issue of their work, and keep an online archive of that issue. This is a reminder of that agreement. And how about that brevity. Congress could learn something from us, I think.

And here's the corporate stuff. We've been a "non-profit" corporation for almost three years now, and we think we've confused you, our readers and donors. Non-profit does not mean inexpensive, or doesn't cost anything to make, or unimportant, or "whatever" - which is darned close to my least

favorite word. Non-profit means only that our intent is to provide something good, and any money that it earns is returned to the business, with the same goal of providing something good. Perhaps the discussion about the fonts we use in our text layout derailed your AMTRAK of thought, so that you forgot that we spoke about being non-profit, and that we rely on donations to survive. Or maybe we're not saying it enough. I put it out on the website, as clearly as I know how, but maybe you still missed it. Let's get on the stick, boys and girls. You can send us checks, or use Paypal on the website. It's easy, and relatively painless if you do it quickly and don't think about it too long. Or, if you're going to think about it, think about what we want to do with the money. More pages. More stories. Cuter authors, (as if *that* were possible.)

See, we almost missed the part about the fonts. They're a Blotter legacy. I happen to find them eminently readable, but of course I wear 2.0 magnifiers I found on the drugstore shelf across from the Trojans.

I've no idea what this is. A chill-pill?

We print 7000 copies per monthly issue. I know! Many find their way into cool places in North Carolina's "Triangle". Or Athens. Or Austin. Or Asheville. Like this place you're sitting in. Did you ask for decaf no-foam? Isn't it great how they're willing to make it exactly the way you want it, like you can't even do it at home, even though we went out and bought that Braun espresso maker? I love that. And the little packets of turbinado sugar? That's going the extra mile. But isn't it also worth a donation? What if you don't want to go out for coffee? Your wife bought you that really nice French Press last birthday, and you've used it, what, twice? See, if you subscribe to The Blotter, and boil a little water, it's like you have your own Starbucks, dude. Kick your feet up.

Radiation warning thingee. Completely irrelevant.

Then there's always this thing, this *apologia* for anything that comes up in the magazine that offends you. OK, who's tired of seeing this? (channeling *Field of Dreams*) Who thinks that the Bill of Rights is a pretty cool thing? Who thinks that Frau Goebbels over there needs to take a chill-pill? So we said "tits". So what? You think it's easy being this glib? Holy crap, I'm freakin' *exhausted*.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com



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CAUTION

Tell me you're still worrying about foul language when the economy is a passenger train toppling into a flooded gully after running over a penny lain on the track.

"Amenityville"

by Gabriel Ward

"Which aisle has tomatoes in it?" Waldo asked, even though he knew the answer. They were in aisle two, one aisle further than the dairy lane. He didn't ask the question because he wanted tomatoes, not really at least; he asked it because he knew the man was going to the dairy lane.

"Honestly, I'm not sure to tell you the truth." The man replied, while his face distorted in disgust. "My wife does mosta the shopping. Maybe you should go ask a clerk."

The man's wife stood about three feet away.

Waldo tried to interject, but couldn't. He didn't have the stomach to argue, nor the wherewithal to cause a scene. It took the man about one more second to look away from Waldo and get back to his family. They all had to get back to the sale; Asiago cheese, as the man and Waldo and everyone else in the store knew, was on sale for the

next fifteen minutes. It'd been announced.

"Thanks, I'll, uh, find a clerk then." He said into the man's back, as Waldo peered down the lane toward the dairy aisle to find a store clerk. He didn't need the clerk, obviously, but he wanted an excuse to keep following them.

Waldo decided to ask him about the tomatoes after the original announcement. The sale, he knew, was going to attract dozens of walkers and families and friends that he hoped he could blend into, and that man and his family, that man who looked so nice in his fall jacket, appeared to be the best fit, so he asked the question. He got the response. And he got lost in the rejection. Waldo believed, in some sense, that each person should know the grocery store like they knew the innards of their own home, as if each aisle should correlate in their brain like the refrigerator correlated to a toothbrush sitting in the downstairs bathroom sink. The two places should breathe familiarity.

Mostly, though, he thought the man would give a homeless guy, like him, the benefit of the doubt. Waldo misjudged. The man cantered away, like a horse in a glue factory high on the fumes of his dead brothers, towards the sale. Waldo, disappointed in the man, followed the group anyway.

As they all trotted towards the cheese, the man occasionally glanced back at Waldo.

Their stroll together only lasted moments, but Waldo enjoyed his

time with the family. He listened to Mom's grocery list; he watched the kids getting anxious for their soccer game, and he felt Dad's impatience. He was touching their family in the only way that he wanted to touch them...at a distance. The peace of belonging without having to belong was one of the few things Waldo needed in his life, and as he followed them, as high on the fumes of the dead horses as them, only for idiosyncratically different reasons, he was happy.

Life, especially at the grocery store, was a spectator sport to Waldo.

"Honey, I know you think the cheese is a good deal." The mom paused, while taking in each different island of aisles she'd passed, to gather her thoughts. "And it is, really, but we don't need it right now. I'm not planning on making anything Italian anytime soon, so it'd probably just sit in the freezer taking up space. I just don't think we need it."

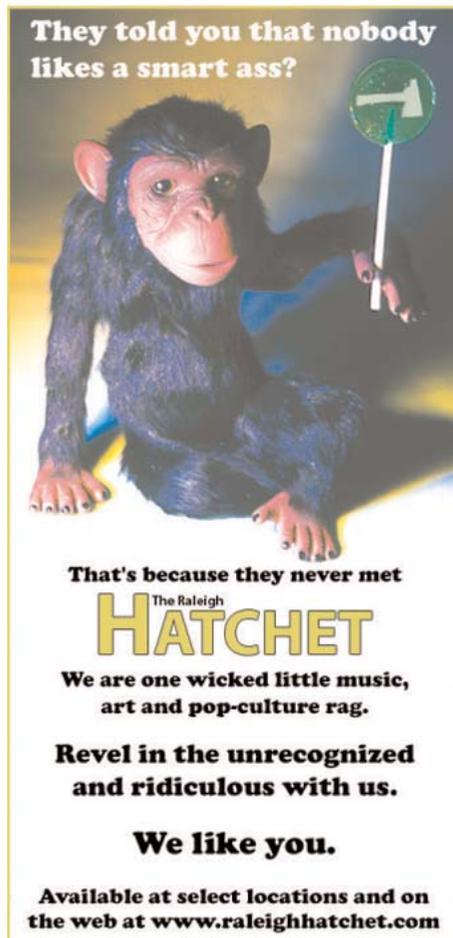
She frowned lovingly at her husband. His back stiffened.

"Fine. We'll get it some other time then." After saying that, he jerked the cart full of groceries into aisle eight. "Do we need anything in this aisle?"

The family followed the father into the shopping lane, and the mother, her face yellowed with embarrassment, followed as well. The family had woken up from the stygian fumes.

Waldo, after losing his family, fell forward dazed. His heart sank, and he idled aimlessly in the middle of the aisle.

Waldo was, for lack of a better word, a bum, a casualty of capitalism. There were certain smells from his Baltimore Raven's jacket that could only be attached to a bum. The goiter



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he'd developed on his throat, which looked puss-red, as if Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer had sneezed on his Adam's Apple, could only have developed on a bum. He was, again, a bum, but he had these characteristics without seemingly being distinct. He was, from any onlooker's perspective, any bum. He hunchingly walked from rotted out legs, his clothing was perfectly touched by disrepair, and he smelled bad. Waldo, in most ways, was typically forgettable.

He liked it that way. He went to this grocery store, not because he wanted to steal food or get noticed, but because he wanted to sink into people. He wanted to hear about their lives and, yet, not be a part of those lives at the same time, and everyone walking around with their dilated eyes, with their little sales calls and all, usually let him get away with it. They'd get their stupendous fifteen-minute sale, hurry or you just might miss it, and he'd get them.

Waldo, after losing them, became frenzied with loss.

He started to move backwards to find a new family, but got hit by a Volvo.

An obese woman, who was flinging her electric kart out of aisle nine and into aisle eight, the liquor lane, rammed into the back of him. And, consequently, he was thrown into the back wall's chicken outlet section. The goiter and the thick jacket made Waldo appear to be a bit heavy, but he was actually very thin. A thick gust of wind, coming off of the Mississippi, could push him over on any given day, so the kart was more than enough to send him into the air. As he landed into the pile of chicken and ice, the

woman threw her kart's break on. He rolled over onto his back and dropped his head into the ice, causing the chicken to scatter around him, and sighed. This wasn't exactly what he was looking to do with his time.

"Ah, god, Ah'm sorry," said the Volvo's driver. Her voice fell out with a sincere horrible twang. "Ah didn't see ya there. God, goodness, let me help ya up."

After she'd adjusted her left biker short covered leg, the woman stepped out of her kart. The leg came out of the kart with some air of the impossible, but she seemed determined to help, whether her leg wanted to or not. Her cheeks blushed with the effort.

"It's okay...don't worry...just, uh, I'm able to get off this chicken breast." Waldo hated to have her attention, anyone's really.

"No, really, let me give ya a hand." She insisted after getting her body moving forward. Waldo, in trying to escape, had already slid down the ice toward the tiled floor of the grocery store. "Oh, you should really let me help ya up. Please, it's ma fault your there to begin with..." She walked closer to him, but slipped on some of the melting ice. In a moment, Waldo would find out that this was how this woman behaved. He would find out that she is an attention person, and as she fell, slowly, like a building being slowly deconstructed, she grabbed at this arm and pulled him down too. She laughed at first, but then saw his horrified face and stopped.

Waldo leapt up from the ground without her.

"Ah'm so sorry, sorry. I apologize." She cried out in a cracked voice,

which seemed too comfortable in her southern throat.

"It's okay, I'm fine..." Waldo said as he pushed the ice off of his jacket and looked around for a place he escape to.

He watched the spilled water crawl up the side of her shorts, and he realized that no one was going to help her up. The multitude of shoppers, just previously swarming the lanes, had disappeared leaving him as the sole savior of the fat woman. He knew that they didn't really disappear; they were there somewhere, just around the corner staring at him and this woman, and he knew, like he'd known since he'd started coming here, that no one would pick this woman up off of the floor, especially not the nice man that he'd been following.

Waldo leaned over and grabbed under her arms, while watching for onlookers. He pulled as hard as he could, his bulging neck palpitated, his knees strained against her weight and buckled in towards each other, but his back held. He pulled her off the ground as she put her hands on his buckled knees for support.

He felt his boots slip a little in the watery icy mess, but they held.

He got her up.

He started to look for a way out of the place. The glue fumes of the dead had completely and utterly left him. People were watching, and they weren't especially welcomed to watch. A twisting sensation began billowing out of his rib cage when Waldo saw her come in for the apologetic thankful thank-you hug. She enveloped him, and he thought about escape routes.

"Thank you, Ah my God, Ah've caused such a debacle...what's your name?" Suddenly her voice



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changed and switched to something different. She put her left hand on Waldo's shoulder and tried to soothe him. "My name's Dolores, and, I believe, Ah owe you dinner or lunch or some other such nonsense that you people in Dubuque call a mid-day meal. Ah hear there's a food stop in this place."

She smiled hopefully at the wet-butted bum. The two matched in the rear.

Down-faced, he shyly answered "Waldo." She commented that she liked his name, but went back to her food idea. The thought occurred to her that a bum at a supermarket must be there for the food, and luckily, she knew this store had an eatery. It was a tacky place covered in painful red hues and was located at the front of the store, but it served food. The store, according to the general guidelines of these things, created the café to look like it'd been in the fifties; it even had fake little jukeboxes on the tables. And Waldo, although intimately aware of his current embarrassment, wasn't exactly interested in being tortured by the bad taste of the café too. "...but I'm not that hungry."

"Oh sure ya are...ya look so thin, come on, my treat." Dolores somehow saw through his jacket to see the emaciated person behind it. She needed to feed him, and Waldo, even in wanting to escape, couldn't impose himself on her persistence. She grabbed him by the arm and started to pull him over to her Volvo.

Waldo followed her, begrudgingly, because he wanted to hide from the rest of the store, and he assumed that the more hideous of a place to

hide, the better of a place to be hidden. Urbanite Camouflage.

The grocery store that Waldo was in wasn't peculiar or particular; it had few stand out points with few signifiers saying it was special. The place was a white-aisled castle of normalcy. The soccer moms frequented it. The obese people drove in it. The fathers sat inside their cars waiting outside of it. The college kids swarmed the frozen pizza lanes of it. And the destitutes snuck into it to appear solemn and hungry. And, of course, the town loved and hated it. The store sat connected to a strip mall, and it held its head above the rest of the city on a hill outside the lower bluffs of Dubuque. It was, of course, a castle of American livelihood loving its parishioners like a sex offender loves their wards. It fondled and hugged each and every group coming in and going out of its electric doors.

Dubuque, though, didn't exactly reflect the insipid love of the normal like this grocery store did. If anything, Dubuque was at war with anything close to normal. The city is located on the Mississippi, inside of a valley, ebbed somewhere away from the rest of Middle America, on the juted edge of eastern Iowa. It is, more appropriately was, full of Catholics and Catholicism, Victorian houses and Victorian living, but without the Victorian's tempered use of alcohol; it's a city caught in turmoil with craft-shop-loving-suburbia, and it's lost to them. The city was going through the changes, those sickeningly normal moves from industry to touristy, and they infected everything. Good Catholic women were being forced to

become the lords of the youth leagues; colleges, mostly Catholic, but even the Lutheran Seminary, suddenly dropped their dress codes in an attempt to become current and competitive with the rest of their Gap driven cohorts; Georgian buildings, downtown within the river valley, had slowly been changed from metal works and clock repair shops to bath scent distributors and fabricated Seattle java houses. The grocery store was only a representative of this oncoming land war of normal America. It was the first weapon's instillation of the war, and when it went up the farmer's market, an open market selling fresh tomatoes and tradition, died as the first victim crushed under its heel. The fondling love of normalcy, according to many Dubuquens, was actually an attempt to castrate the town's lifeblood.

Waldo attempted to see, even through this confusion between protector and violator, a real redemptive side to the store. As he followed Dolores to the café, he glanced around the aisles at the meats and the cheeses and the families, and he saw a group of items, normally segmented in origin, somehow mystically combined by a single place. The beauty beat on him as he walked with her.

Dolores, at first, seemed very eager to get to the eatery, but her pace to the café slowed to a meander the further they got into the walk. It wasn't that she didn't want to eat; it was that her attention span couldn't handle the inconceivable onslaught of sales each row of food had to offer, and she, unforgivably, had just went on a diet.

"I just have to get a few more things...oh, just let me grab this...it'll be one more moment, wait I see someth'n I gotta git. I'll just store this stuff till I get done with my diet..it'll be fine." She kept repeating the same things as they inched slowly forward. She ran around in her little car, while Waldo's decrepit legs banged every slow inch. He'd hitched hiked every year for the past twenty years between Boston and Dubuque, but none of that beat the hell out of his legs like she did.

"That's fine, take your time..." Waldo hurtfully uttered. He hated himself as he said it, cursing inside his brain at his brain for not being able to say anything otherwise. Waldo, in almost every bit of his being, was built to be unobtrusive, even at the expense



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of himself. "I'm not in any hurry or anything."

"Great, great...that's the kinda thing I always like to hear. With people up here, everyone's in such a dang rush all tha time." She twanged this out, ignoring the aching voice behind the comment. She, instead, turned her thoughts to the stocks on the shelves and began an exegesis on the subject of things. "Ya see people, that is, most everyone, well, most everyone up here at least, well, they don't pay enough attention to tha time it take ta do things, that is ta do things right. Always in a rush. Ya see, I could buy this here food in the fridge, but is it worth it or is it better for me ta have. Or will I just choose to buy it cause I'm hungry and it's quick...It's kinda like, well, I could make scrambled eggs-fix'em good and all- with pepper and shrooms, but if'en I leave out the milk, ya know, to soften em' up a tad, cause I'm in a hurry and all, well, I'd as soon as not be cookin then. Ya know?"

"Sure." He ignored her like she ignored him.

"Sounds like it." She could tell that her audience got lost on the metaphor. "Well, how abouts we head on over to the eats and get started."

"Sure."

With that she pulled herself away from the labyrinth of white aisles to get herself and her company to the main lane of the store; she actually, finally, started heading to the café. She was still assuming that food was Waldo's goal. She didn't know the man.

Through the years, a lot of people have tried to guess what Waldo wants, and usually, they ended up deciding that he wanted food shoved down his throat. It's the easy answer...he's homeless.

In 1984 he stepped into a little dinner outside of Boston. He needed a break after a long walk from Hartford, and the booth in the back looked attractive. The trip had roughed him up a bit, clothes were slightly out of place, mud had been patched in inappropriate places, so he wanted to sit down, relax, fall into the background and disappear into the restaurant, but nobody would let him. Everyone wanted to feed him. An old couple bought him a cherry pie. A young man bought him a slice of apple pie, and

another person bought him a blueberry pie; each must've thought that rotgut and rotten teeth were an appropriate solution to a starved road-beaten bum. They wanted to shove the food down his throat because they didn't know what they were supposed to do. Waldo, of course, didn't mind the food, he actually was sort of hungry, but the food wasn't what he wanted; he wanted the dim light bulb resting squarely above his booth in the corner.

He ate the pies only out of some ancillary hunger.

Waldo, in the past twenty years, had amassed two massive light bulbs collections: one in Dubuque and the other in Boston. The bulbs came from all sorts of place; he'd taken some from banks, stores, diners and even a few of them got lifted from Fenway Park. It was the only thing he liked stealing. He'd work himself into the air, the ambiance, of a place and at the appropriate time, when he'd fallen completely into the background, like the well in an etching wood, he'd strike.

As he went into this roadside diner, he'd noticed that a booth in the back was dimmed. He walked over to it and sat down and didn't move for hours. A lot of people noticed him at first, fed him and everything, but slowly, as the time ticked by and the pie tins filled up at the end of his table, people forgot about him. It was dim back there. And it probably wasn't the first time people tried to ignore a homeless guy, but Waldo knew, unlike everyone else, that the booth's light bulb was a forty watt bulb instead of the proper eighty five...and he knew that that was why they forgot him, he was in the dark.

It was his patience that won

him so many bulbs.

After a few more minutes of waiting, he got up and walked over to a waitress.

"Ma'am, I was noticing that the light at my table looks somewhat dark. Do you think it's dying?" He asked, while standing far enough away from her so that she couldn't smell him. He didn't want to wake her up.

"It does look kind of dim, doesn't it?" She responded. "I'll get some extras out of the kitchen."

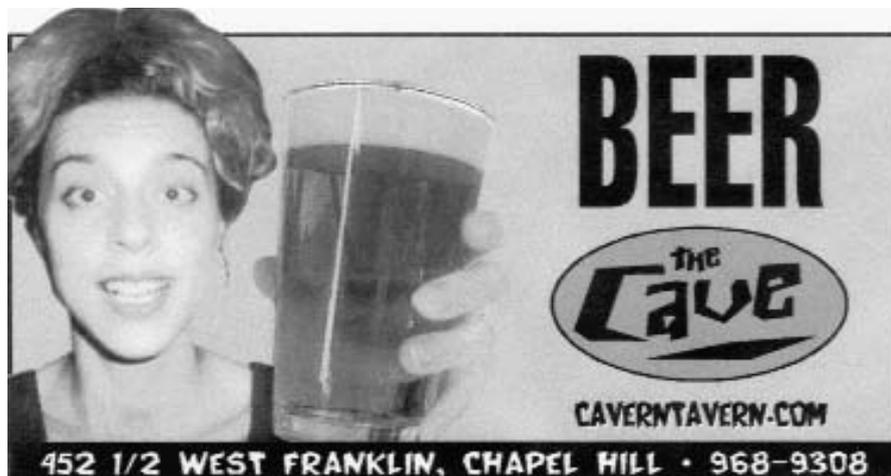
"Well...don't you have things to do? You know, serve all of these people?" Waldo stared out onto the restaurant floor in an innuendo that the place was packed with work for her to do. There were only two other couples there, but the thought crossed his mind that she might need a reference on her busyness.

She looked at Waldo with a sweet smile and then pointed at the kitchen door.

"The light bulb s'around the corner, grab it and fix the booth and there'll be a piece of blueberry pie in it for you."

She smiled again, so did Waldo.

Dolores and Waldo were about to walk in to the gaudy grocery store's eatery when he heard another sale being announced over the loud speakers. It was for some kind of Nordic fish he couldn't pronounce. The families became enwrapped in the announcement and moved, like a thousand swallows in the turning wind, toward the back of the store where the fish was selling. It was housed beside the chicken. Waldo wanted to go, but he knew now, because of Dolores, he couldn't just



Magnolia Ballad

for your English grandmother

If one could long for a bowl of light
or a cloud-dish of evergreen,
and find it across a sea, that's what she did.
It's the 40's, the war is done. Her victory

is this man, a simple wedding,
and fare-thee-well to bombed-out London.
The Atlantic is a blanket-toss, and her new home
is the Land of Flowers, brilliant and lonesome.

So that she'll not forget the folks or the garden,
she plants magnolia. A Brown Beauty
or Sweet Bay or Saint Mary is her counterpoint
to loneliness, in this land of *look away, look away*.

By the time it brims with blossoms, Florida's home.
Now it'd break her to know, some 50 years hence,
the stately trunk will be chopped and burnt.
Limbs will be stripped of their cream-cups and split.

For she's reading in *Cross Creek* about magnolias.
It's true: the leaves shine a patent leather green,
and the undersides, *Look away, look away*,
wear a brown scrap of English velveteen.



Damsel fly

Paused on the underside,
the damselfly folds her wings across her back
like two matched slivers of isinglass.
Her body, thin as a thorn,
flits by in sepia tone.
She pins her wish to the ridges of a leaf,
then flickers along the edge of a pond,
the night-green mirror of her fairy life.
Her sorrows are wind and a stream gone dry;
she lets herself be blown from sight.
In late day sun, when her wings glint like tears,
she darns the torn hopes of the hyacinth.



The Cabbage Palm: 'Lessen You Cut it Down'

With a crown piercing the ferris wheel sky, cabbage palm cartwheeled
across the swampland, in olden days, or poked shadows in the understory.
These ribbons were a green rollercoaster that folded and wove through twilight.

In the hands of the Calusa, the climb and drop of days brought
sleeping mats, chickee thatch, heart-palm meals, battle spears.

Now cabbage palms are planted in queues down a thousand miles of interstate,
In Tampa, heart of palm salad is served with keylime sherbet.
In Disney World, the storied trunks tack down corners of a new town square.

But in spring drought or summer flood, salt marsh or tidal pond,
the green-gray pinwheels still prickle against sunrise and in tilt-a-whirl
winds and rain, they just give.

Even now, against the back-lit streets of Celebration,
air ferns clasp blackness inside the old leaf stems on the trunk,
and a black snake curls there in the moonlight's sideshow.

The fronds stab at clouds drifting on Paynes Prairie or slice shadows on the Everglades.
Wish-you-were-here fronds that seem tipped with stars,
like lights strung across a midway.



The Blotter

meld into the background of strangers. He'd become apparent, so he kept following her to the café with his shoulders slumped over, slightly bumping into his goiter.

They walked in under the café's sign: Dogville. It was an onslaught. Waldo knew the store, but tended to avoid this part of it. He couldn't stand the placid posters on the walls with their pictures of hotdogs and hamburgers saying stupid things like Hmm, Good or Delicious. He cringed at the day old dogs in the hotdog rollers and the fifties red décor with intermittent sparkles splattered everywhere. The place, to him, was a mess.

He grabbed a chair near the back. He wanted to be hidden, and he figured Dolores wouldn't be able to fit into one of the booths.

"These seats don't get them jukeboxes."

"I'm sorry, did you want music?"

"No, the darn things don't even play music, but they would've been nice to play with." Looking pathetic, she started to stare at one of the plastic booths that did have a jukebox. She knew she wouldn't fit. "Why do they only put those damn things on the booth tables. Seems a bit shortsighted, don't it?"

"Um."

"We'll...let's get some food."

The vicissitude of her voiced pain changed again to a sullenness of tempered pain, a willowy speak turned comfortable.

"I'll get it. And, uh...thanks again."

"Don't mention it. Really." She breathed out; it came off like she was shutting her big body down in preparation for the feeding. Her breathing had become scattered up until just that point.

He went to the lunch counter with their orders. She'd chosen the chilidogs and picked out a hamburger and fries for him. The strange thing about her buying him food, unlike most of the times when food's been bought for him, was that she was going to sit and eat with him. He didn't know what to make of it. Sure, she was fat, probably hungry and all that too, but why sit with a smelly wet bum? It made him feel creepy. What was wrong with her? He didn't particularly like the fact, either, that she didn't seem to

mind attention as much as him. It occurred to him that nothing could hide her.

"Here." He said carefully, as he put her plate of chilidogs on the table. "Chilidogs, right?"

"Thank ya so much. You know, if 'en I hadn't told you before, I'd never had a chilidog before I came here. Sure, they have 'em in West Virginia and everything, but, ya know, I'd never thought they looked appealing. Sometimes, well, when you look at something gussied up a bit different than normal, and everything, it just, well, seems, well, more attractive. Ya hear what I'm saying? Well, anyway, thank you for getting these for me."

"Sure." Waldo already knew she was the type of woman who asked questions that she didn't expect to be answered. The queries lollygagged around in the air of the apparent, eventually being sucked of life by life. Waldo waited a moment; he could see she was waiting on something. "Thank you for the meal."

A smile crashed into her face.

"Oh, it's all right...you deserve it after what I put ya through. I'm sorry that I wasn't paying much attention." The smile suddenly left her face with the apology, but returned after a few minutes. Her emotions danced back and forth while she talked, sniffing the air for the right time to renew either her happiness or her regret. Dolores, while eating her chilidogs, began to fall into the stories of her life with intermittent apologies to Waldo. She obviously felt bad about hitting him with her Volvo and asked him, several times, if he could get salmonella from sitting on a raw chicken breast wrapped in plastic.

As she talked, Waldo found out about her home life and her heart problems and about how bad she felt for hitting him and how nice her Mom was and so on and so on and on and on. She told him about how she got to Dubuque and how she adjusted. She told him, he could tell, everything there was to know about Dolores in a span of twenty minutes. Waldo, somehow, did this to people, as if the years of listening to people and stealing their light bulbs left some indelible mark of humanity on his face. He made talkers comfortable, and after their initial repulsion, they opened up to him, felt sorry for him and loved him. Dolores,

as she fell into Waldo's ears, seemed to learn to love Waldo because he heard her and because she thought that he forgave her.

"...and that's why my Mom got me this little kart to carry me around, the doctor suggested it. I didn't want it, but, ya know, with my heart and all, well, the doctor thought best. Am I boring you? Ah always feel, ya know, when I go on like this that I'm being boring about it all, ya know. Well, he just said it'd be one of the best ways for me to keep going on with ma life as normal as possible." Dolores, in muddling through her life's details, kept coming back to her heart surgery. "There's a strangeness," she said, "in having the hoses in your pump cleaned out so early on in life." The aftereffects of surgery caused her life, periodically, to spiral into new epsilons of weirdness and, on other occasions, to plummet to barely plausible levels of mediocrity. Waldo realized that at any age heart surgery could be traumatic, but he realized for her, at her young age, the experience had become codifying to her personality. She would never be able to escape that one event.

"That kart of yours is nice. A Volvo, right? I've seen these in the store before; I mean not like this one- this is really nice." Almost unabashedly, he touched the front of the cart. "But they're similar. Your kart is much...fancier."

"Thanks." Dolores's face became red again, but he wasn't sure if that was because of the kart or because of the cheese on the chilidog.

"...this has got a carrier on the back and it's four wheeled. It's nice, really it is."

"I call him Pete." She responded. The face attached to her head, the head that was lodged into her shoulders, gave the final definitive look of anger, embarrassment, longing, shame, obesity, intensity, and hunger needed to convince the gods themselves of her hate for Pete. "It's not that important."

"I noticed the head light isn't on...is it broken?"



After Reading With Ignorance

And thanks to C. K. Williams
for writing those long lines that whip
about in the wind and occasionally
sting when the end catches you
on the cheek or right between the eyes,
in the pineal area, that muscle
you use to read the good, tough stuff.

A Sight Better

"My eyes took in only eye-shaped/things..."

Matthea Harvey

I see you and don't see you.
You're too busy to see me.
I see that you can't see me
yet if I look in the mirror there
is your idea of me. I see,
I say, to the reflection. Then the
next day comes as next days do
and you say, see here. I do
want to see you, you say. I say,
I can't see it happening. It goes
on like this till one or both of
us are blind. Then what we see
will be what we remember if
we can remember at all in
the darkness of our own selves.
Let's just see, you say. Let's
just let it all happen like vision.

by Corey Messler

A Sleep, A Wake

Last night I slept the sleep
of the dust.
And this morning my dreams
are swept away
by a trilling draft, my daughter
singing, life, life.

The Blotter

An Arts Festival like No Other

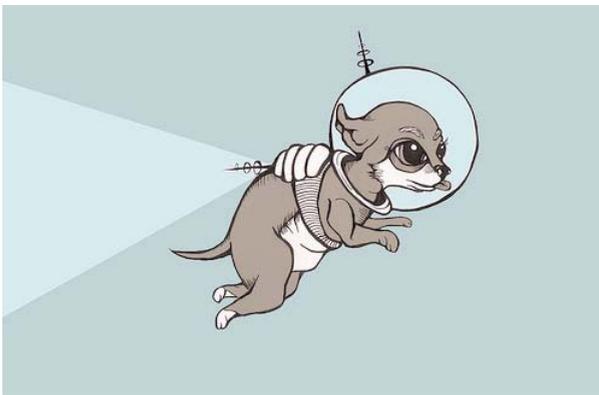
Visual Art Exchange, in conjunction with DesignBox, is pleased to announce groundSPARK . 2008 Raleigh Street Painting Festival. The festival will be held September 19-22 in City Market in the Moore Square Art District as part of SparkCON. All festival events are FREE and open to the public.

This is not your typical art festival. Moore Square and City Market will be filled with over 400 artists actually painting the street, using Martin Street in Moore Square as their canvas. The artists will have only 27 hours to complete their work and will work alongside graffiti artists, fashion designers, musicians and sculptors as well as the 12 artists chosen to participate in the inaugural Art on the Move project. This project will wrap Capital Area Transit Buses with the work of local artists and will be unveiled during the festival.

Visual Art Exchange (VAE) has produced the Raleigh Street Painting Festival for ten years, as part of its mission to support emerging artists and to connect the community with the arts.

groundSPARK . 2008 Raleigh Street Painting Festival
September 19-21, 2008
City Market in the Moore Square Art District

Visual Art Exchange (VAE) is please to announce that Raleigh artist Casey Porn has been chosen as the featured artist for groundSPARK the 2008 Raleigh Street Painting Festival



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Why aren't you reading
The Blotter?

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VS. MAD ROLLIN' DOLLS

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AT DORTON ARENA, STATE FAIRGROUNDS

"Generations" by Jason Huskey

Slap her ass once for me!

It's weird to hear the words garble through the wall, knowing Grandpa's snuck into my cabinet again. Can only hope

he's not watching our wedding video. Bethany wakes and works the covers off my body. *Would you keep it down,* she whines, snorts, snores.

Grandpa's been having a tough month since Granny went to the west coast with his convertible and a black man half her weight. We've, well, I've

not slept in weeks, hearing his wavering thoughts in the waning hours, bedsprings squealing to the white noise of one hand clapping without breath.

You can't leave him like that!

Bethany sleeps without the torture, and I'm starting to wonder just how Granny walked away without guilt,

hearing him tidy up with my wife's wash sponge. If she ever finds out, we'll both be gone, washed away with his withered sperm.

The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

Please send excerpts from your own dream journals. If nothing else, we'd love to read them. We won't publish your whole name.

mermaid@blotterrag.com

I usually hate "back in college" dreams - inevitably I am looking for a classroom that's mislabeled on my schedule, or a textbook that I set on a bench and cannot retrace my steps. And of course the textbook is priceless, irreplaceable. But on this rare occasion, I dream about a rush-night of some sort, in a college town that looks more like the neighborhoods of my childhood, where we children walked for hours trick-or-treating or sledded down the shallow hills in the middle of unplowed streets. The trees in each yard are impossible elms and chestnuts. I'm meeting a professor at home, to sign up? drop out? and there she is, with another student, a girl whose name escapes me. They sip wine coolers, and I lean forward and kiss the girl. Her breath is as sweet as fresh picked peach and her lips have just a touch too much gloss, and still it's perfect. Back outside, packs of fraternity boys wearing sweaters and dirty-bucks in the late summer heat look like they're spoiling for a fight, but it's not the time or the place. In the distance, campus crusaders for different deities sing their songs, and I am oddly drawn to them. For once I know the words and melodies.

HS - Cyberspace

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CONTRIBUTORS

Patient as a saint, **Gabriel Ward** of Dubuque, IA, has been published in *Alpha* and *TheFlaskReview*. He graduated with majors in English and History, but is working as a stockbroker. Frankly, we English majors infiltrate all aspects of society. It's a plot of ours. Get it? A plot! It's an English major joke!

Our friend **Lori Ballard's** photos can be seen at www.loribphotography.com and **Gianna Russo** crafted these poems, *Florida Plant Studies Series*, specifically for Lori's photos in this issue. How cool is that? They (pix and poems) will be shown and presented at The Bunker in Ybor City, FL this fall - see www.yborbunker.com or Lori's website for specifics.

Jason Huskey's work has appeared in *Perigee: Publication for the Arts*, *Red River Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, and *Word Riot*. A graduate of Longwood University, he currently resides in central Virginia. And he's polite as all get-out.

Casey Porn is a visual artist and small dog enthusiast. She is a graduate of NC State University's College of Art and Design, and was awarded The Regional Emerging Artist Residency at Artspace NC in January of 2008. Using black and white line work, Casey illuminates her subjects against brightly painted backgrounds. The majority of her work is inspired by small animals with big dreams....and yes, her last name really is Porn.

Corey Messler of Memphis, TN, has prose and/or poetry in *Adirondack Review*, *American Poetry Journal*, *Paumanok Review*, *Yankee Pot Roast*, *H_NGM_N*, *Euphony*, *Jabberwock Review*, *Cellar Door* and others. He also has two novels from Livingston Press: *Talk: a Novel in Dialogue* and *We are Billion-Year-Old Carbon*. His first full-length collection of poems, *Some Identity Problems*, (Foothills Publishing) came out in 2007. He and his wife own Burke's Book Store, one of the country's oldest (1875) and best indie bookstores. Buy Local!!

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