

*Something's coming, something good: David Halperin,
Geraud Staton, Holly Day, Phil Juliano
and The Dream Journal*

The Blotter

February 2013

MAGAZINE

Geraud

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Martin K. Smith
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Jenny Haniver
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Garrison Somers, Editor-in-Chief
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919.933.4720 (business hours only!
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Marketing & Public Relations Contact:

Marilyn Fontenot
marilyngfontenot@gmail.com
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FRONT COVER, Robin Hood by
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The Blotter is a production of
The Blotter Magazine, Inc.,
Durham, NC.
A 501 (c)3 non-profit
ISSN 1549-0351
www.blotterrag.com

[c l m p]

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“Miss Nieubauer and the no good, very bad, horrible class.”

She was brand new. Probably – although I knew nothing at the time of such things – had only just finished her “student teaching.” She wore her pretty blonde hair in the style of the day; no bangs, parted on the side, equal length all around, just short of shoulder length. Curled under, like the English models so popular at the time. Her skirts ended above the knees, not like the suits of Miss Muller who taught upstairs in the second grade and who was the only other “girl” teacher in the school. (All of the rest were *women* teachers, mom-aged or older.)

So she was interesting for a while. But it was school and we were all eleven years old, or just twelve, and had the attention spans of goldfish, and we noticed that we frustrated her almost as much as being at school on a sun-dappled fall day frustrated us. Arithmetic wasn’t much fun in the best of circumstances. Social studies? It was 1968! We could watch *real* social studies on the TV when we got home, men in suits trying to understand frustrated college students who were definitely not Young Republicans, barricading the doors of their colonnaded buildings, shouting, making Vees with their fingers. Boy, that got old people’s attention, even more than wearing your hair long or your blue-jeans belled at the bottom.

Use a new skill and it’s yours for life. The three sixth grade classes took a field trip to New Hope, PA for some reason which over the ensuing span of years completely escapes me. We took a ride on one of the canal barges and generally made a nuisance of ourselves, shouting *peace!* at the top of our lungs to passersby and waving our freak-flag vees at everyone we saw. Little neatniks acting out. We had no idea what it all meant, but boy-howdy it sure made grown-ups wriggle with discomfort. It had to be a good thing! Even the girl in my class who’d had the *Nixon’s The One* bumper stickers glued to her blue loose-leaf notebook the previous spring now wore her hair like Miss Nieubauer’s and donned mini-skirts so short she no longer could successfully play kickball and said “like, you know, *duh!*” in response to everything asked of her. She was Cool! Immediately, we all cultivated a “duh!” into our vocabulary. But school, with its infinite capacity for boredom, went on. We moped and twitched, grumbled and groaned, and stared out the window like kids have since Socrates first made Greek youth sit on uncomfortable stone chairs and listen to him. But we also *rebelled*. We pushed books out of the window. We chewed gum. And we picked on her. As only a class of twenty-five or so sixth graders can. We started calling her “Newbie,” which, naturally, bugged the heck out of her. We copied her – said “alright!” back at her when she said “alright, class!” in exasperation with our traipsing with exaggerated slowness from noon recess back inside. *Alright, Newbie!*

Miss Nieubauer fumed. We imitated her head-swing, the one she used to get her hair out of her face when any...frumpy teacher would have just bobby-pinned it back. First, just the girls. Then the boys, even those of us with buzz-cuts. It was ridiculous, but irritating.

And then one day we didn’t come in from recess. Like, you know, just didn’t come in. Most of the sixth grade. With that kind of group-think that crowds have when they are like-minded, we heard the whistle to line up by classrooms and sat on the slope above the dodge-ball court. Heard the second whistle, still didn’t move. When the recess monitor – one of the third-grade teachers – stomped over, we actually started chanting

“no, no, we won’t go!” Perhaps I misremember, perhaps not, that it was something I’d heard behind Chet Huntley on Dad’s news program, and it just poured out of my mouth in that regular way I had of getting in trouble for talking when I wasn’t called on. Suddenly the entire crowd of eleven year olds was shouting. *No, no!* The teacher’s eyebrows went up in shock. We all felt our hearts race – because the teacher turned and walked away. *No, no!*

I don’t recall what Mr. Bailey, the school principal, said when he came out. I’m sure it was a calm and level-headed threat of parental intervention. We did line up and march quietly inside, yet satisfied that something had happened. After all, we’d managed an extra quarter-hour of recess, or something resembling it. Lost recess for a few weeks. We hadn’t even considered reasoning out the math for that one.

So now Miss Nieubauer was stuck with us after lunch. We were the same annoying bunch we’d always been, and she was just as annoyed at us. But it was here that this young woman, this freshman teacher, had her moment of teaching brilliance. Genius, really. She came in the next morning. Everyone sit down, she said softly. I’m going to read you a story.

We were caught off guard. No punishment? No Earth Science or Rules of Conjunctions or Adding Fractions? You bet we sat.

And she started reading: *In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit...*

By the end of the first page, we were each one of us caught in the web, good and tight. She stopped suddenly and made us a promise. One chapter, if we were good and did our classwork and behaved. No more dropping textbooks out of the windows. No more racket when we walk down the hallway. Come in from recess when called – if you ever get recess again, that is. Yes! We promised. Please tell us more of Bilbo Baggins and Thorin Oakenshield and Gandalf the Grey!!!

By November we were under her spell. Even on the cold, wet days of winter, when you can’t wait for Christmas and the colder, frozen days after Christmas when you can’t wait for spring, we toiled in hopes of twenty blessed minutes of our book. We didn’t get a chapter each day – she knew better than that, and the chapters were often long and entrancing. When it got warm, we were allowed to sit outside and listen to her read, sitting with her back against a tree and all of us gathered around her like the Von Trapp children learning how to do-re-mi from Fraulein Maria. She must have known the book inside and out, because she could get us to mop paint off floors just by ending a session with Gandalf’s return. She kept us in thrall for two weeks in the cobwebby gloom of Mirkwood. As I recall, the book ended just as sixth grade was winding down for summer, as thoughts turned towards how the Mets were starting to play like a real baseball team and Apollo X did its loop around the moon.

Oh, she could teach, alright. *Peace!*

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CAUTION

*Blame is for
small children.*

An excerpt from "Journal of a UFO Investigator"

by David Halperin

Chapter 1

The UFO fell from the sky on the night of December 20, 1962, the week of my thirteenth birthday. The event itself, after more than three years, I recall with perfect clarity. Many of its circumstances, however, have blurred in my mind.

I can't remember, for instance, where I'd been that evening. I was certainly coming home from somewhere, maybe a meeting of some sort. I see myself standing before the house, on the front lawn, just a little off the sidewalk, ready to go inside yet looking steadily into the sky. It was very cold, and it must have been late, certainly after 10:00 P.M. Orion was high in the southern sky over the house, Sirius not far

below and to the east. All the stars were extraordinarily clear, their colors very marked. I could make out the red of Betelgeuse, the ice-blue, diamond-blue glitter of Sirius. There was no moon.

The object appeared in the east. I don't know what called my attention to it. I was not surprised to see it. I'd been a UFO investigator for two months, since the fourth week in October. I knew such things were there in the skies, if only I was ready to look toward them.

It was a disk, glowing deep fluorescent red. Darker at the edges than near the center. Apparent size about twice what the full moon's would have been if the moon had been visible. It moved westward at a leisurely pace, toward me, briefly obscuring the

stars as it passed beneath.

My camera was in my bedroom, third dresser drawer. My father's binoculars were on a shelf in his den. I was torn whether to run into the house to get them, knowing the thing might be gone when I came out. I suspected it wasn't likely to register on film. While I stood trying to decide, it came to a dead stop over the house.

How long it stayed motionless, I don't know. I didn't think to look at my watch. Suddenly it began to flutter downward, in a classic falling leaf maneuver, as if to land or crash on top of me. I tried to run; my feet wouldn't move. They tingled as if electricity were running through them, the way the body tingles when lightning's about to strike. Or when a

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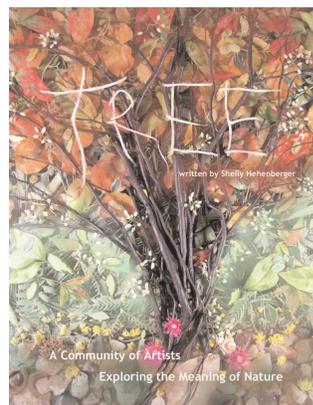
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nightmare begins and I don't yet know how it will end.

My legs crumpled. The frozen earth, its winter-brown grass red in the blood-colored light, slammed against my body. I lay in a twisted S, my face turned upward, the back of my head wedged against the ground. The disk—solid, heavy, bigger than a bus or even a boxcar—fell quivering a few hundred feet above me. Its crimson glare pulsated, darkening slowly, all at once brightening. It swallowed up the sky.

My hand at least would move.

I felt around my pocket for my key chain, found the thick metal triangle, the Delta Device. I squeezed—

The disk stopped. Hung in midair.

Not because of the Delta. It can't have had that power. But after a few seconds I felt the gadget vibrate in my hand, and I knew: yes, this works, just as Jeff Stollard and I had planned. Another moment, and I might be crushed to death. But not in silence.

And the disk—

"Danny!"

—spoke to me. The words it said I have forgotten. Maybe they weren't words, just sensa-

tions, images or feelings perhaps, stimulated within my brain—

"Danny!"

The door opens. She comes in.

My mother. She leans on the dresser, just inside the doorway to my bedroom, breathing hard from the strain of walking twenty feet.

"I've been knocking. Didn't you hear me?"

"No," I lie. But it's not quite a lie. I heard her knock but didn't entirely hear it, just as I see her every day, but not entirely. Right now I hardly see her at all. My desk lamp is the only light I have on. Outside its circle, she's in shadow.

She shuffles over to me, in her bedroom slippers. She always wears her bedroom slippers.

"Danny. Do you know what time it is?"

I glance at the last words I've written—*images or feelings perhaps, stimulated within my brain*—and move my hand to cover the paper. A mistake; I've called her attention to it. I look at my watch. "About eleven thirty," I say.

"Almost a quarter to twelve."

"Eleven thirty-seven," I correct her.

"It's a school night. You know that."

"I know."

She persists: "Christmas vacation is over."

Oh, yes, don't I know it. January once more. Wake with the alarm before it's light, ride the school bus through the bitter gray morning. Try to do the reading I didn't do last night. Then stagger from class to class, boredom to boredom, my eyes foggy with all the sleep I haven't gotten. Eleventh grade now. I turned sixteen last month.

She stands beside me, resting her weight on the back of my chair, touching my shoulder with her fingers. I lean forward. It makes me nervous when my mother touches me. I smell the sour sickness of her body. I don't turn around, but I can see her in my mind: spindly limbs, gaunt, peaky face. Her thick cat eyeglasses, the lenses like teardrops. I wear glasses too.

"What are you writing?"

"Oh ... something for English class."

"English was my best subject," she says.

When she was in high



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school, I guess. English is my best subject also. When I write, the teachers tell me, I sound almost like a grown-up.

“A story?” she says, leaning over me, trying to read what I’ve written.

“Sort of. We’re supposed to write ... a kind of journal.” I’m making this up as I go along. “Of somebody who we are. Who we might be.”

“A story,” she says, as if that made it so. As if she still knew me from inside out, top to bottom, the way she did when I was little.

But this isn’t a story. And it has nothing to do with any English assignment. Writing a story, I know the twists and turns in advance. I know how it’s going to come out. This ... journal, I guess, comes from a place I don’t yet know, and it unfolds itself inside me, bit by bit, so I can’t see beyond the next folding.

“You know it upsets Daddy,” she says.

“What upsets him?”

“You staying up to all hours like this. Night after night.”

And not even out on dates, like a normal teenager. I know the

way my father thinks. Sixteen; at that age I ought to go out with girls. I don’t; therefore I’m weird. Abnormal. Not really his son. I investigate UFOs; that makes me weird. I study the Bible too; that makes me weirder. He has no idea what I’m going through.

Neither does she, though most of the time she’s nicer about it. I touch my hand to my pants pocket; my wallet’s there. When she’s gone, I’ll take it out, look at the card.

“Danny!”

His voice, irritable, calls from the den. “What, Dad?” I yell back.

“How much more you gonna be up?”

“Maybe another half hour.”

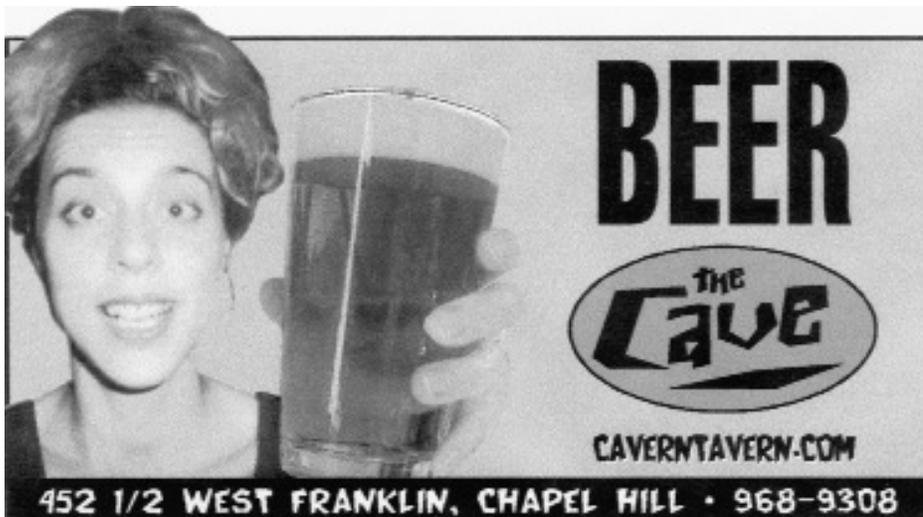
I hear him grumble to himself. I hear everything that goes on in this house—this little matchbox the three of us live in, all the rooms jammed together, no doors except for the bedrooms and the bath. We moved here ten years ago, after the heart attack, because the house is all on one floor. My mother can’t climb stairs.

She nods at me, as if to say: *You hear that? A half-hour. You promised.*

Does this story—journal, whatever—come from some UFO world? An alternate reality, where I’m still Danny Shapiro, and Jeff Stollard and Rosa Pagliano are still people who’ve been in my life? Where nevertheless we say things, do things, experience things that have a weight beyond ordinary reality?

It’s possible. I’ve read articles about automatic writing, ouija boards, communication through our souls from the beyond. Mostly I don’t believe those articles. They’re written by crackpots. I’m a scientific UFOlogist. If we’re to solve the mystery of the disks, as we surely will, if only we keep working at it, ignore the idiots who ridicule us, it will be through scientific research and analysis. Nothing else.

The images rose within me this afternoon, as I rode home on the school bus. It seemed half a dream, yet I know I was awake. The other kids’ songs, their teasing, their yelps of laughter at jokes I don’t quite understand washed around me like water around my bubble of air. It was like remembering things I’d known, but for years had barely thought of.



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—images or feelings perhaps, stimulated within my brain. And while I tasted the relief that I wasn't going to be squashed after all, at the same time pondering how remarkable it was that this disk, this alien craft, should descend over me like a spider on its thread and speak to me mind to mind—

My mother eases into bed. I hear her, through the wall that separates her bedroom from mine.

—the object pulled up, lifted back into the sky, shrank to the apparent size of a silver dollar held at arm's length. Then a quarter. Then a dime. It moved away, continuing its interrupted path westward, until it vanished in the distance—

My hand stops writing. All on its own; my brain just watches what's happening, perplexed, marveling. I lay my pen down. I know I can't force this. I pull my wallet from my pocket, and there's the card, hidden behind the driving learner's permit that arrived yesterday in the mail.

The first phone number was mine. The second—"OREgon 8-0496"—was Jeff Stollard's. Still is, though now they've made it all numbers. In eighth grade, and the summer before that, Jeff and I were best friends. That fall we wrote our science paper on UFOs together; we got all excited, agreed we'd keep on until we found the

truth, write a book about it. What are UFOs? Where are they from? Do they come to help us or to conquer and destroy? I still search for answers. Jeff no longer cares.

Christmas vacation of eighth grade—just before New Year's 1963. I walked the mile and a half to Jeff's house. There'd been snow, but the weather had turned sunny, a bit warmer, the sidewalks awash with the melt. Jeff and I ran off the cards on his toy printing press, and in home room after vacation we announced our club. Rosa Pagliano came up right away and told me she wanted to join. Me. Not Jeff.

Wherever she is—does she still have the card I signed for her?

I imagine Jeff threw his away long ago.

But I have mine, softened and worn from three years in my wallet. On the back is the heart I drew, pierced with an arrow, *DS & RP* written inside. *This time*, I told myself, *I'll turn it over, look at the heart, bring back my old dreams*. I can't. It hurts too much.

DS could stand for *Dumb Shit* as well as *Danny Shapiro*.

I wish I'd written my initials out in full, *DAS*.

The *A* is for Asher, my

mother's grandfather, who died in the old country. That's why I read the Bible, so I can understand the old man I never met and know the reason his name is in mine. I don't believe in God. I pray when I'm desperate, *Please, dear Lord, let it not be too late for me*. Too late—to be normal. To be invited to parties, have friends and girlfriends; the feeling deep in my soul says I was half, now I'm whole. No more hunger and thirst ...

That's my only prayer. Seldom do I resort to it. I know there's no one listening.

I investigate UFOs because unlike God, they are real and can be seen.

"Danny!"

My father sounds louder now, and angrier. How would it be to live in a house that's dark and quiet sometimes, where parents go out together and I can be alone? But my mother's too sick. We go out only as a family, to visit my grandmother for the Jewish holidays. Until the break-in we hardly even locked our door. My mother was—she *is*—always home.

"Yes, Dad?" I call out.

"Will you turn off that god-damn light and get to sleep? It's

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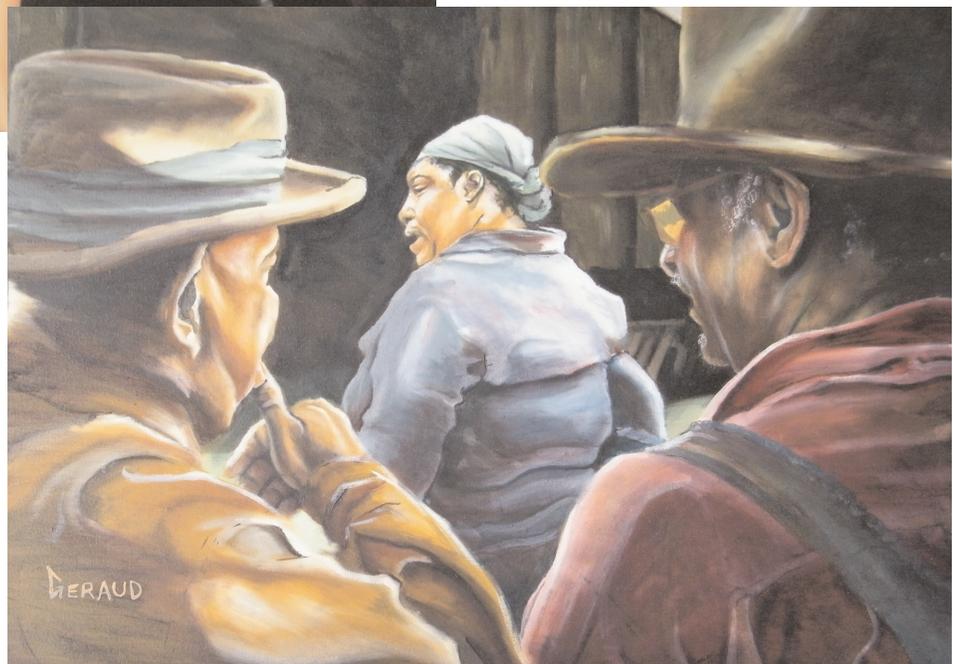
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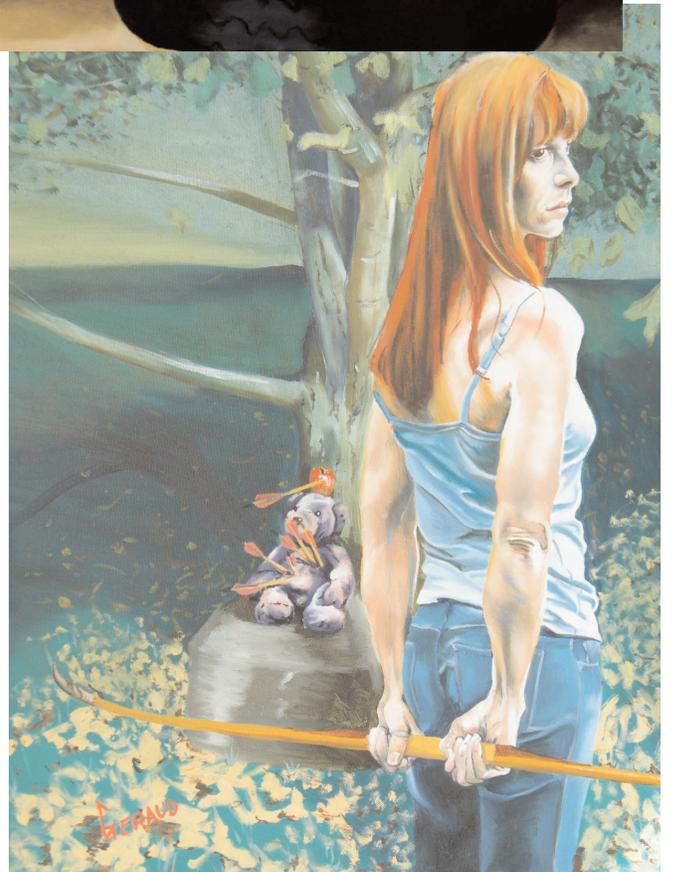
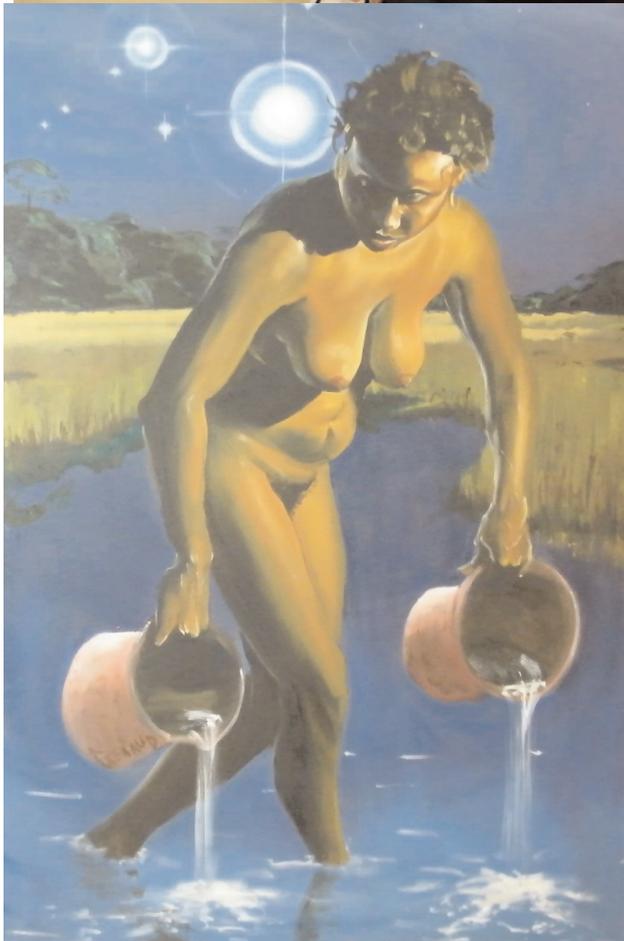
Upper Right: Sirens

Far Right: Defending Her Honour

Lower Right: Star

Lower Left: Watching Miss Sassy





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past midnight, for God's sake!"

And only now have I picked up my pen. I should begin to be frightened. Not of his wallowing in; he's never done that. But of the tidal wave blindness of his rage, the bitter words that burn like lava, that will leave me scorched and desolate and sleepless afterward as I struggle to swallow what the three of us spend our lives pretending isn't so. Namely, that he hates me and everything I am.

I run my free hand over my face. No pimples, at least none ripe for lancing. So tonight the worst is unlikely. "Yes, Dad," I holler. "In a minute."

It'll be a lot more than a minute. I can't help myself. It's flowing again, pouring through my pen, and will take me, if only I can

follow, toward the place of truth, the heart of all secrets—

Shivering—from the chill, from the terror of the death that had hovered above me and now was gone, at least for now—I pulled myself up from the ground. I brushed bits of dirt and grass from my heavy coat. I felt in my pocket for my keys and let myself into the house.

It was dark there ...

... and very quiet, except for the phone on the kitchen wall, ringing loudly over and over. It had been ringing even as I opened the door. My watch read 11:37.

"Hello?"

"Danny! Are you all right?"

Jeff Stollard. I pressed the receiver against my ear, breathing

hard. "Damn near crushed me," I said, as soon as I could speak.

"What? What crushed you? What are you talking about?"

My parents must not have been home. Lucky for me. I could almost hear my father: *Don't your friends know better than to phone you in the middle of the night?* But he wasn't around, nor my mother. Jeff and I could talk freely, as long as we needed. Like the summer before, between seventh and eighth grade, when one or two evenings a week we sailed off on our bikes into the softening light, and when tired of riding, we walked the bicycles, no parents to eavesdrop, until we'd talked through everything we cared to understand. Religion, mostly; how his being Baptist made him different from me, me different from almost everyone in our school. What happens to us, if anything, after we're dead.

"So you got the signal?" I said.

"Told you it'd work."

My keys were still in my hand, the Delta Device attached. The Delta rested in my palm, a shadow among shadows. I ran my thumb over it. Two small triangles of sheet metal, their edges hammered into curves and soldered together, the wiring pressed inside. It pained me to feel the lumpy, splattery soldering, to remember how the gun had jumped and trembled in my hand. Jeff had done his better, smoother. In metal shop he always did better than I did.

"But what was the emergency?" he said.

I tried to tell him. My teeth chattered; I had to stop and take a few breaths before I could go on.



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“Whoa, whoa,” he said. “Are you trying to tell me this thing actually landed?”

“No, it didn’t land! My God, if it had landed—”

“I’m not your God, Danny.”

“For God’s sake! I just meant—”

“I just meant, don’t take the Lord’s name in vain!”

“I’d have been squooshed like a bug!” I screamed, and felt my saliva spray over the receiver. I felt myself getting demerits, over the telephone wires, for being hysterical. “It was bearing down on top of me,” I said. “And—and—”

“And?”

“It spoke to me.”

“Really? What did it say?”

A serious question? Sarcastic? Jeff can be both, and you usually don’t know, even from his expression, until afterward.

“‘Until the seeding,’ ” I said.

“The *seeding*?”

He spelled the word out, and I confirmed it. *The seeding*. Even as I wondered how I’d earlier lost the memory of what the disk said and why it just popped out now, talking with him.

“What’s *that* supposed to mean?” he said.

I couldn’t tell whether he was going to laugh or have me exorcised, try once more to convert me so I won’t go to hell when I die. “Until the seeding,” I repeated, and felt the electric tingling shoot up through my legs, my thighs, the two currents meeting in my belly and running upward. My hand shook so I could barely hold the receiver.

“It was heading westward,” I said. “Toward Braxton.”

He didn’t answer, and I knew what he was thinking. Rosa Pagliano lives in Braxton. Would the disk stop over her house, as it had over mine? Descend to her, speak to her? Take her inside? I thought of how she’d smiled at me in music class, while everybody was singing that song “And I’ll not marry at all, at all, and I’ll not marry at all ...” And then I really began to shake.

“Do you think—you know—I should phone Rosa? Let her know—to go outside—she might see it too—”

“You wouldn’t dare,” Jeff said.

“Don’t be mad—”

But he’d hung up. I stood, receiver in hand, and felt my heart going *thumpa-thumpa-thump*, the way it does in sentimental books.

Only this was for real, very unpleasant, and I wanted it to stop, to be as I’d been before I saw the UFO, before I knew there were things in the sky besides moon and planets and stars, airplanes and birds, the ordinary stuff a little kid might know. Once or twice I heard my father yell, “Will you turn off that goddamn light and get to sleep?” It had to have been my imagination. My father wasn’t even home—I could not hear him mumbling in his sleep from the bed he’d set up for himself in the den, because he couldn’t stand lying next to my mother anymore—and besides I hadn’t turned on any light. I hung up the receiver. After a few minutes I lifted it again. With trembling fingers I dialed Rosa Pagliano’s telephone number.



Best In Show Comic



by Phil Juliano

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

Suddenly there I am, in a middle school science classroom, being taught Spanish by maternal Colombian Gloria from ABC's acclaimed TV series Modern Family. But Gloria isn't being herself—instead she's being Jane Lynch's dictatorial cheerleading coach from Glee. Did I mention the rest of the classroom is populated by various members of my extended family?

Now we are outside. Cruel Gloria Lynch with her overdone Colombian accent takes half of my familial classmates to another field and begins to lead several oddly Minute-To-Win-It-esque games involving balloons and maybe marshmallows. I'm not sure how that teaches them Spanish, but I'm too busy being internally conflicted and confused about how to relate to my classmates on an academic level to worry about that, because for one reason or another my classmates all appear to be small children in need of assistance.

Gloria Lynch begins cursing in incomprehensible Spanish, unceremoniously awaking me from my overthinking. I'm watching from a distance, but she seems to be making inappropriate sexual advances at several students/kids/relatives of mine, including graphic descriptions and farm animals in her verbal assaults. A slew of distinct but concurrent protective instincts speak up in my brain, stirring me to action.

But then we are walking back to the classroom. I'm speaking to a reasonable, Spanish-speaking friend from high school, but I have no idea who he was or if he ever existed. We agree that something must be done about Gloria Lynch's oppressively totalitarian and wholly inappropriate teaching style.

Back in class, my mild-mannered older brother Stephen steps up to Gloria Lynch at the front of the class. He reasonably and politely stakes his claim, gently informing Gloria Lynch that she probably needs to relax and not be so aggressive or overly sexual with us. She slaps him. Then she backhands him hard, a wicked grin of smug satisfaction spreading across her face.

I wake up, curious about why my subconscious is directing so much violence towards Stephen and concerned about the frequency with which Gloria plays commanding authoritarian roles in my dreams.

I should probably watch less TV.

M. Dickson - Cyberspace

Call for Entries!

"The 2013 Laine Cunningham Novel Award" The Blotter's *Fourth* Annual Long Form Fiction Contest for Novella and Novel length works

1. The purpose of our contest is to provide a venue for writers to have their work read and commented on by our editors and judges. Additionally, the winner of this contest will have his/her work published here on these pages. And last but not least, the winner will receive a monetary prize! (Award monies are provided by the prize sponsor and the entry fee for the contest helps offset The Blotter's costs.)
2. Our pre-reader judges are intelligent and highly proud of their educations. Our final judge is smart, well-read and fiercely possessive of her personal space. She gets to be the final judge and as Pop says, "there are no ifs ands or buts about it."
3. In a world besmirched by foolishness and scandal, transparency is very important to us, and we make every effort to eliminate any conflict of interest situation from going down in our contest. Blotter volunteers and their family members and/or employees are prohibited from entering our contest.

To enter the contest, please submit your work with a \$25 entry fee by check or money order to: The Blotter Magazine, 1010 Hale Street, Durham, NC 27705. Entries must be received between November 1, 2012 and February 28, 2013 (you see, we're already giving you an extension, so don't put it off!)

Your entry must contain the following: no less than 10 pages and no more than 20 pages of the opening of your novel or novella, (or subject/character-connected short story chapbook) typed & double-spaced, without your name. On a separate cover page type your name, snail-mail and e-mail address, telephone number, the title of your novel or novella and a one page synopsis of your novel or novella. Remember, you have to have the entire book written, so that if and when you win, you can show us the rest! Sounds easy because it is!

BONUS: Enter the writing contest AND get a year's subscription to The Blotter for only \$30! (Regular annual subscription donations are \$25 total and you don't even get to enter a writing contest with that price!)

Well, now. \$650 in cash prizes, plus books and other fun stuff we've been accumulating around here that we think has value. All placements, including honorable mentions, will receive an award certificate, proof positive of your success as an author, suitable for mocking your sophomore English teacher, who always wondered how it was that you graduated at all.

Our contest will be run in line with the rules of ethics and mechanics recommended by the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses, as outlined in their 2006 monograph on the subject. You can't view for free, but you may purchase the monograph entitled "Publishing Contests: Ethics and Mechanics" through the CLMP at <http://www.clmp.org/about/monographs.html>. This is the document we have used in coming up with the rules and conditions of this contest.

So that's it, then - now get to work!

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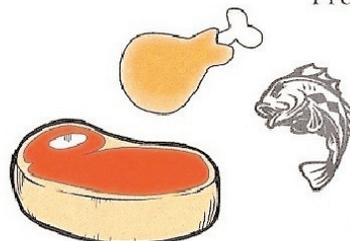
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Three by Holly Day

"The Houseguest"

I take a deep breath and fix my hair, open
the refrigerator door and smile as comfortingly
as I can at the small boy with the impossibly large dark eyes
and the stringy black hair that lives in my refrigerator this week,
next to the plastic-covered leftover pot roast
and potatoes my daughter-in-law brought me
last night, next to the half-eaten sponge cake I made
for company that never came, next to an apple with
a bite taken out of it, more brown than
red. I reach into the refrigerator and
turn the carton

so that the little boy is facing me from inside
the fridge, partly so that he doesn't have to spend all day
staring at the back wall of the refrigerator, and partly so I
can reread the particulars of his disappearance. Yesterday,
when I first brought him into the house, I
was sure he was with his mother, Janet, listed as having
disappeared the same day, but today, I imagine him in
a dark hole, a cistern, trapped close
to home but too far underground

for anyone to hear him call out for help,
his tiny foot perhaps stuck under a rock, struggling
feebly as the rats grow brave and draw closer to where he
huddles in the dark. I wonder if I
should go out and try to find him myself, but I
don't really
know where to start looking. His name is Timothy, according to
the carton, but I've been calling him Tab
this whole time, because I like that name, and because he sort of
looks like a Tab to me. "It's been nice
having you here, Tab," I say

as I shake the container. There is just about
enough milk left for one more morning cup of coffee.
"I hope you've enjoyed your stay."

"Already"

inter them in peat and believe
in a time when the sun heats
the earth and fetal bodies
grow leaves and propel
flowers into the sunlight,
lifting faithful fists lofty
to celebrate in the world;
I hold my faith close. Snow

flurries beyond the porthole
hardly heard or felt through
brilliant thoughts so fantastic,
yearning affections for
the minuscule kernels coiled like
springs, hidden and restrained
by frozen mounds. Lonely

for greenery, I imagine the caress
the sluggish murmur of frost clambering
like fingers around their curled forms
dream of groundwater running unrestrained
beneath the soil, of being absorbed
by moist dirt myself.

"In the Cold Absence of a Church"

Skeletal arms reach around the corner of the bed and pull back the blinds with fingers of yellowed bone held together by dried strands of sinew. I keep perfectly still, knees drawn up to my chest beneath the blankets, holding my breath. If I pretend I'm not here, Death will go away. If I engage Death in conversation, he'll find a way to take me with him. The nurse

Is back, and she says I have to get up now, that I have to walk around my room at least three times a day, that maybe today I could try to walk all the way out into the hall. "I won't let you fall," she says, over and over. "I'll be right there to catch you if you start to fall." She leaves

And Death emerges from the dark places between the hospital equipment, a shadow inflating slowly until he fills the whole room. I close my eyes and pretend to be furniture, pretend to be part of the starched white sheets spread over my thin, useless legs, whisper to the darkness that someone is already coming to get me, that Death has come for me too late.

CONTRIBUTORS:

In the 1960s, **David Halperin** was a teen-age UFO investigator. Later he became a Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill—his specialty, religious traditions of heavenly ascents and otherworldly journeys. His first novel, *Journal of a UFO Investigator*, was published in 2011 by Viking Press; it's appeared also in Spanish, Italian, and German translations. He's currently at work on the sequel, to be entitled *The Color of Electrum*." David blogs about UFOs, religion, and related subjects at www.davidhalperin.net. Follow him on Facebook at www.facebook.com/JournalofaUFOInvestigator.

*** **Geraud Staton** writes, "Strength. Energy. Radiance. Adventure. Passion. Hope. Inspiration. Mystery. This acronym is how I define Seraphim Studios, the title I've given my art business. I desire a life filled with these things, and I want to provide those same ideals to as many people as I can. With that in mind, I try to ensure that every oil painting I produce fits into my above list. We are what we surround ourselves with. My work, then, is a reflection of these ideals. I begin a painting by envisioning a story, then deciding what elements are important to that story. I decide on the model or models that I want to use, arrange the props, and begin the composition. Sometimes that part takes as long as the actual painting. Once creation begins, I can become immersed in the oil painting, almost sculpting the flesh from the canvas. I paint in layers, and each layer takes me closer and closer to the finished work. When a piece is going well I am often filled with a sense of wonder. I am often outside myself and take great pleasure, in in the act of creating, but of the witnessing of the creation. I have this same feeling when I watch others paint. Being a North

Carolina artist allows me access to some amazing painters. I know a piece is done when I can see the story clearly, without distraction. But this isn't enough. This story is only my point of view. I never want my art to be so one-dimensional. Not that this is a bad thing. Sometimes a painter has a specific and important point. But, for me a successful piece of art is one where the stories are varied for each viewer. When I look at works by Juan Medina or Michael Whelan, I can often see multiple stories, and in my best works I hear people describe so many different opinions of what that works means. That's when I know an oil painting is a success!" *** **Holly Day** writes, "For me, November is all about waiting for things to get really bad around here, when the weather's gotten just cold enough that all the trees are bare and all the plants are dead and most of the birds are gone but it's still not too cold to try to spend as much time as possible outside because any day now, it'll be 30 below zero and you won't have any choice but to huddle inside, immobilized under blankets until spring. I've got a blanket on my lap right now as I type this, but it's more for the cat than me. If it wasn't for the cat hiding under my chair, curled up in the folds of the blanket and purring against my feet, I'd be fine without my office blanket for at least another couple of weeks." She is a housewife and mother of two living in Minneapolis, Minnesota who teaches needlepoint classes in the Minneapolis school district. Her poetry has recently appeared in Hawai'i Pacific Review, The Oxford American, and Slipstream, and she is a recent recipient of the Sam Ragan Poetry Prize from Barton College. Her book publications include Music Composition for Dummies, Guitar-All-in-One for Dummies, and Music Theory for Dummies, which has recently been translated into French, Dutch, German, Spanish, Russian, and Portuguese. *** **Phil Juliano** doesn't write, he draws. And how!!

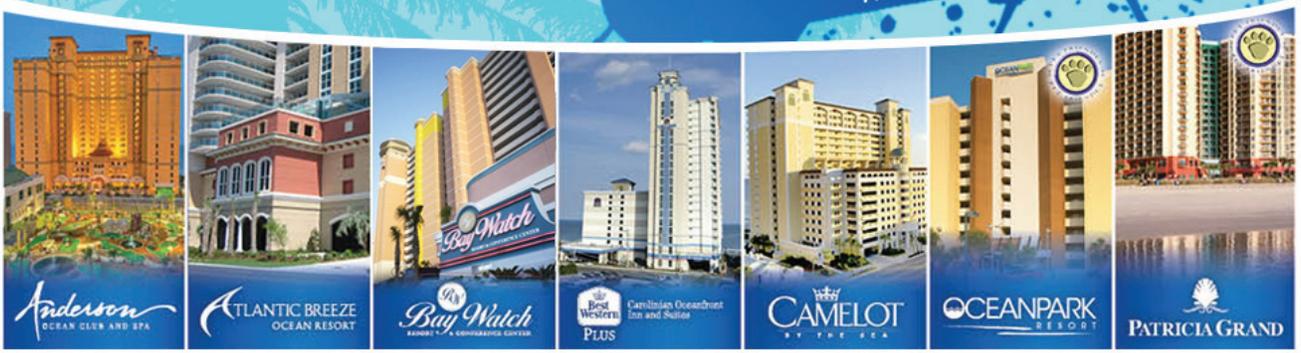
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