

*It's all fun and games until Adreyo Sen,
Jane Cocke Perdue, Gerald Withers,
Phil Juliano, and The Dream Journal*

The Blotter

August 2016

MAGAZINE

THE SOUTH'S UNIQUE, FREE, INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE AND ARTS MAGAZINE
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COVER: "Jellyfish Music" by Beatrice.

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The Blotter is a production of
MAGAZINE
The Blotter Magazine, Inc.,
Durham, NC.
A 501 (c)3 non-profit
ISSN 1549-0351
www.blotterrag.com

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"Background 1.0 cont."

In our house there were two girls, my sisters, and two boys, Dad and me. And balancing it all out – centering it, really - was Mommy. Glasses, dark hair, low, soft voice Mommy, with her laugh, and the way she sang a song or told a story or taught you how to do something. And the powder smell of her. The dresser in her bedroom had perfume on top, and a telephone – the family could use it but because it was in the bedroom it was more likely that when we finally began using the phone to call our friends or to take calls from our friends, we would use the one downstairs instead. So this was the parent phone. In her dresser drawers Mommy hid Lifesavers candy – Pep-O-Mint, and Spearmint and the feathery soft wintergreen flavor. If they were old enough, that is if nobody found them or Mommy put them in one of her handbags, then the mints became soft. Then they would melt in your mouth, sweet and fresh and wondrous. Mint had that ability to make even breathing special and cold and shivery, even in the middle of hot, humid summer. I fell in love with mint because of Mom hiding candy in her dresser. I also learned to steal, or sneak, or whatever word you choose, because of that love of mint.

One of the strange things that ended up on Mommy's dresser was a wig-head – a place for Mommy to put her wig. I don't know why she occasionally wore a wig when we were little, but it was just different enough from her normal hair that we always knew when she was wearing it. Perhaps it was a style thing, something that every woman did during that time. Or it was her "make myself more beautiful" thing – something for herself. But that wig, on its eyeless, faceless styrofoam head at night was creepy to me.

I much preferred Mom in her own hair, or wearing one of her hats. She had round, Jackie Kennedy style hats – black or teal or blue, with the small veil pieces, residuals of taffeta that remained from old styles. With her glasses and jacket-and-skirt outfits, they made her look very sophisticated. She also wore gloves, white cotton, because all women back then did.

Later, there was a television on her dresser. By then, she had ceased being Mommy and had become Mom, and this was our miraculous second television. She rarely shoo'd us from the bedroom if we were sitting on the bed watching TV, Dad downstairs commandeering the family set. She would sit at her sewing machine at the foot of the bed and work – the machine humming or hammering the needle

through the cloth as she made dresses for my sisters or other clothes for herself. It was reassuring to have her there in the room, although she had taught us to fend for ourselves, feed ourselves breakfast and lunch, clean up after ourselves – inasmuch as children ever perform such tasks satisfactorily. We grew up with her guidance.

Mom and Dad had matching closets, with sliding doors. Mom's was filled with hatboxes and suits and dresses and shoeboxes. Dad's had sports-jackets that he wore to school, brown tweed and gray tweed. His shirts were ironed and hung on hangers, button down shirts of different colors, and the light-blue and military green shirts he had received as Navy uniform shirts back during World War 2. They had somehow survived for eighteen years of steady use, rebuttoned, stitched when they tore at a seam. When I was older and of a similar size, then I absconded with these tough-guy shirts, different from any worn by my contemporaries. I also reached a point as a teenager where I could wear Dad's shoes, and I'm sure that he wasn't pleased by that, because I beat the hell out of them.

On Dad's dresser there was a mirror and three small drawers. Atop the drawers were his comb, hairbrush, roll-on deodorant, papers from his pockets, his wallet. The small drawers were like treasure chests, they held the accumulated valuables of ten-thousand days of pockets. Buttons from overcoats. A brass money-clip with an S on it – one of Grandpa's. Tie clips of different shapes and styles, with monograms or precious stones affixed to them. Gold-colored cufflinks. Coins – from cash from China and Reichpfennigs from Nazi Germany and coins from Fascist Italy to old American silver dimes and quarters. Black and white photos of Dad's friends in the Navy. Cigarette lighters, of a style I couldn't comprehend. One was cast-aluminum with a tiny flip-cap and a wick and friction roller mechanism that was made by a German POW during the war. Another was a slim brass device that looked like it was meant for dress occasions. A third type was a steel match, that had a twist off cap and a contact strip for scratching the head against, just like a match. And three or four Zippo's of different styles. Dad kept his lighter kits here, too – lighter fluid and replacement flints. And it was here Dad also threw any loose Raleigh cigarette coupons that didn't make it yet into the small cabinet in the living room where he kept his vast coupon collection, waiting for him to redeem them for some important treasure, and any packs of cigarettes that weren't Raleighs – the odd old Lucky Strike packet he'd bought when given no other choice, perhaps. The drawer had that pleasant chemical smell of

continued on page 15

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CAUTION

I fought the law and the law

“First Loves”

by Adreyo Sen

When I was at boarding school, it was my misfortune to be in love with my bullies. Their dark suaveness thrilled my bones.

In my second year at boarding school, my form mates and I moved to our main houses. My main house was Oberoi, known for inconveniently humorous seniors, their nocturnal preoccupations aided by our sottish housemaster, who only ever showed up at midnight, drunk, to bemoan his marriage to our matron, and close the night to the hilarity of ‘his boys’ with an awful rendition of *Auld Lang Syne*.

The Sc Formers, the final year students, were desperate to be entertained. We were fresh meat. They discovered they could capitalize on my creativity and coyness, my inability to separate fact from fiction. One of them, shaped like a porpoise,

with little, mean, dark eyes, was especially fond of me. In a satirical fashion.

When prep started, he would summon me to my room. There, he would splay his bulk across my bed and start massaging his crotch. I assigned no meaning to his crotch-love. Balls – footballs, basketballs, ping pong balls – were our passion in boarding school. It was, as a novelist who graduated from our school commented, all balls.

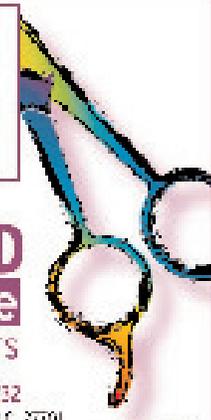
Deven, the porpoise, would inspect the tuck he had confiscated from our cupboards – our hidden Pringles and Chocopies. He would shove a fistful of crisps into his mouth and belch to proclaim his ‘studliness’ – belching and farting were important indicators of masculinity.

Then he would smile widely and insincerely at me.

‘So, Mushroom,’ he would say – I was Mushroom because of my unmanageable hair and its resemblance to weed – ‘tell me about your girlfriend.’

The previous summer, I had been daydreaming. Thus, my imaginary girlfriend was vivid in my mind. She made a romantic figure, slight, curly-haired, modeled on the antiseptic lady love of Douglas Jardine in *Bodyline*. Unfortunately, she was encumbered with the gaps in my imagination. I had never seen porn, not even the sticky printouts of Cameron Diaz my form mates brought back proudly from seedy internet cafes. And so, till I was in my twenties, I would never realize the bosom was not

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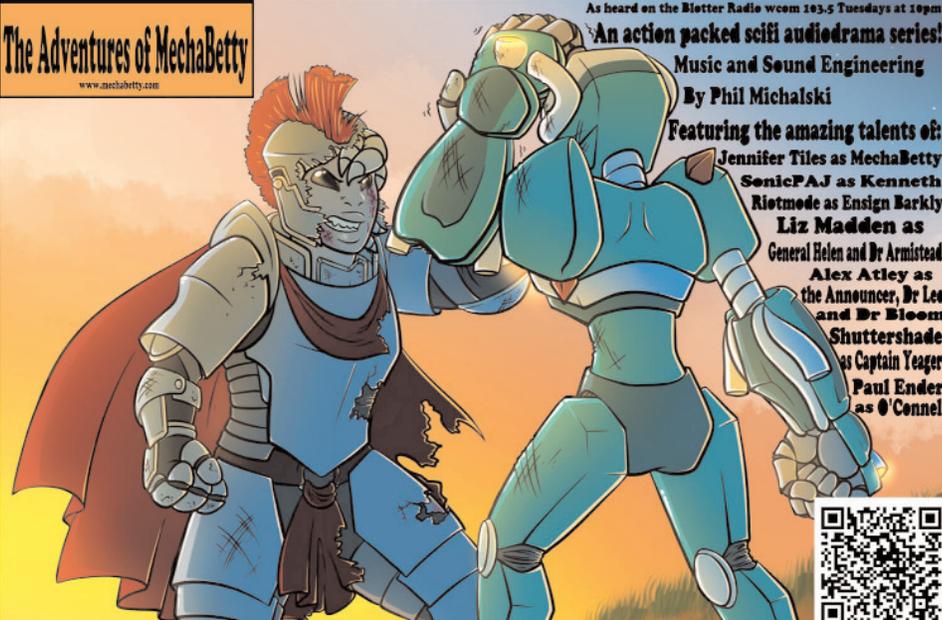
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as O'Connel



one contiguous geographical wonder, that, in fact, women had two breasts. This discovery struck me with childlike delight. But I am getting ahead of myself.

‘So, Mushroom,’ Deven would say, happily interrupting me, ‘Am I right in understanding this, your, ahem, Aparna, has a square ass?’

‘Of course!’ I would protest. That a woman could have a rounded bottom struck me as heretical. It would be years before I discovered Beyonce. And the delightful and always delighted Sofia Vergara.

‘And, let me get this straight,’ he would say, winking at the simpering boys who’d gathered around to see me suf-

fer, ‘You guys have had sex?’

‘Lots!’ I would protest, looking him in the eye.

Even in my daydreams, I had never kissed my Dulcinea. I had nicknamed my already imaginary girlfriend with the name of Don Quixote’s idealized love, partly because it brought to my mind a phrase I didn’t quite understand, but still wanted tattooed on my forearm: Dulce et Decorum est Pro Patria Mori.

‘Dude,’ Deven would say, turning to the snickering audience, ‘This guy is full of shit.’

Maybe Deven felt bad for what he put me through. Or maybe he wanted to prolong my suffering. But he decreed, when he graduated, that I get an extra pastry in his memory every

night at Café. The problem was I had to eat it very slowly in front of a resentful audience of new final years.

‘So you like that pastry,’ someone would say.

‘Yeah, I see you liking it, bitch,’ another would say, bringing a face ravaged by frightening house spirit close to my sports-disdaining mug.

‘Yes!’ I would wail.

But as dashingly terrible as Deven was, he was definitely the lesser of the two evils I encountered in boarding school.

My great nemesis that same year was a guy named Thud. Inappropriately, since there was nothing Thud like about him. He looked like a stained glass angel, albeit an angel perpetually



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cold and furious, with angry, red-rimmed eyes. His middle parting, possibly modeled on Di Caprio's emotive locks in *Titanic* (this was 2002), accentuated his severity.

That year was the last year I showed up to PT, our morning torture in awful, scratchy singlets, where I exposed my failure to keep time by facing north while the rest of my squad faced south. Our PT leader, a chubby, misshapen giant, called me out and spat his fury into my face, spectacularly punctuating his tirade with 'fucks.' We learnt to use the f word to punctuate early on in our school careers. This must be Thud, I thought, he looked like a Thud.

I was so wrong.

Usually, my ridiculous attempts at physical dexterity ended up with me in the press-up position, palms and feet on the ground, my head taking in the frazzled armies of ants traversing the arch my body made through canyons of grass. But one day, I was especially upset, or dazed. And when my housemaster asked me why, I violated the cardinal rule of school life – Thou Shalt Not Sneak – and said, simply, through the snot veiling my face, 'Thud.'

It seemed very appropriate. A metaphor, a summation, a statement of fact. Thud happened.

The next morning, scampering past the great staircase in the main building, I was arrested by a terrible, cold presence. I stopped to look up. Veiled and then lit by the fickle light, the real Thud made his presence known, slowly stepping down in his starched blue shirt and white trousers, his evil eyes boring into mine. He stopped in front of me and glared.

'I will fuck you up,' he said.

I waited in terror and then with pleasure. But he never did anything. Instead, he made me aware, for the first time, that he was very much a part of my main house. Every now and then, more *and less* often than I liked, I would trip over him as he sprawled across the floor of the terrace like a ruminating spider, or sidle past him as he looked across the balcony railing like an attenuated and grotesque parody of *The Blessed Damozel*. And each time I crossed his path, his eyes would follow me. And I could feel his evil grin lacerating my back.

But he never did anything. Or said anything. He never even joined in the frequent serious colloquys about my hygiene and lack of sporting ability. I was known as Spastic then and later. He never called me anything.

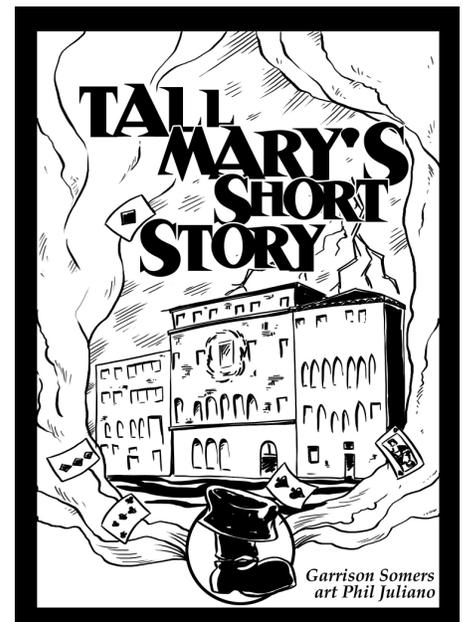
After he graduated, Thud showed up to school one weekend to take part in a theater pro-

duction. He dribbled his basketball outside the dining hall with wasted dexterity. Shattered with love, I tried to impress him with my mumbling affirmations of world weary cool. He indulged me and my heart flowed.

Years later, just out of university, I would still remember Thud. And write to him. And he would reply and tell me he remembered me somewhat and that he'd been a right bastard in school, something he now (so charmingly) regretted. And the very defectiveness of his English – our boarding school didn't teach us to speak English correctly, only to curse with great flair – was so touching and sweet that it brought tears to my eyes.

So he was definitely the greater evil. I still love him. ❖

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“The Day ‘The Bus’ Came By”

by Jane Cocke Perdue

This past year, Jerome Bettis was inducted into the NFL Hall of Fame. He has been a famous “home-town hero” in Detroit for a long time. During Superbowl XL, he was clearly the most popular XL (extra large) player on the field. And, as I watched him during that game, clear the way for Ben Roethlisberger’s touchdown with a timely block, I thought about how he had cleared the way for me as a teacher in the inner-city of Detroit. Jerome issued some directions to my students that turned my life around.

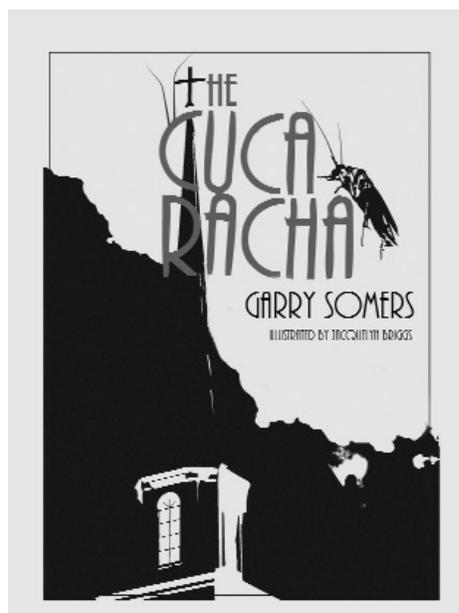
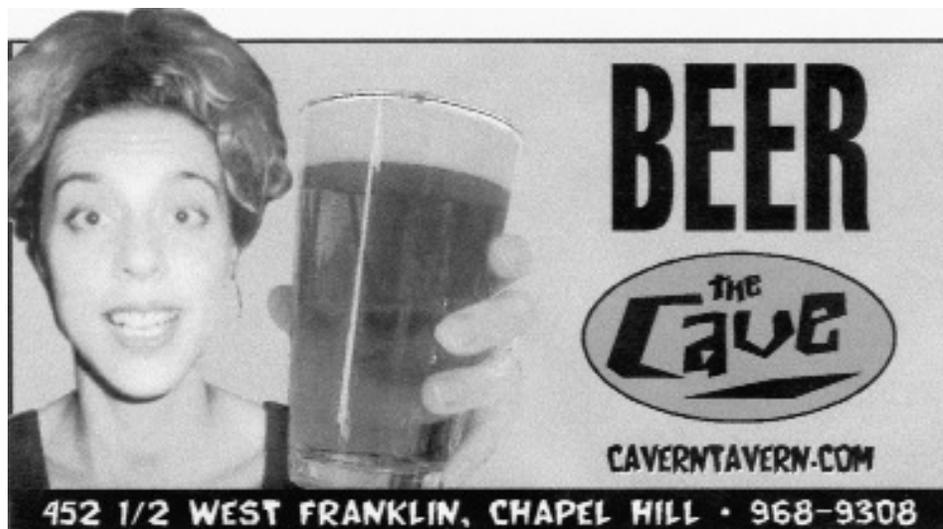
In the late 1980s, my spouse, a Presbyterian minister, accepted a call to be the Senior Pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Michigan. It is located in an affluent suburb, about twenty miles north of Detroit’s third-world inner-city core. At the

time, I had taught for about ten years primarily in parochial school settings in Austin, Texas, and Jacksonville, Florida. I needed to work. I needed a job with a salary. We had five almost-grown children - three of whom were in college at the time, one had just finished and the fifth was to start in a year. We were confident that I could find a job teaching in Birmingham. Not to worry! Then we had to face reality. Thousands of education majors from nearby Michigan schools (University of Michigan, Michigan State, Wayne State University and others), who had completed their practice teaching in Oakland County, were drooling to find jobs in that idyllic area of privilege and wealth. My limited resume gave me no chance to compete.

I began to drive toward

the city of Detroit. After an exhaustive search, I finally accepted a job at St. Leo’s Catholic School. The church and school were founded in 1910 and the school had become a mission after the riots of the 1960s, serving a wounded neighborhood that had never recovered from that time. The area was prolific with crack houses and empty lots that gathered the detritus of human desperation – bottles, cigarettes wrappers, discarded condoms and drug accoutrements. There were pockets of houses and humble neighborhoods where parents struggled daily not to lose their children to the streets where they were being offered a

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good deal of money to be runners for the drug dealers. My seventh graders were being attacked to and from school by gangs who would take jackets off of their backs and shoes off of their feet.

St. Leo's School was administered by a very realistic and strong woman, Sister Grace Schweitering. Bishop Thomas Gumbleton was the presiding priest at the adjoining church. The dedication and endurance of these people as well as others was a constant inspiration to me during my time there.

However, my first year was a total nightmare. I tried to use the white, middle-class, psychological teaching techniques that I had learned in previous school settings and I was completely

ineffective. For instance, I would say, "It is time for our spelling test, students." What a joke! I expected the pencils to come out and the notebooks and the attention to be on me as I dictated the assigned words. Not to happen! No one cared about a spelling test and they just continued to test me and taunt me as I represented to them the system that had trapped their families in the inner-city when the automobile industry deserted the city. One day, when I said that I was catching the bus home because of a problem with my car, one of my sweetest students looked at me and sneered with vitriol dripping from her, "Ain't no bus goes to Birmingham!" I had a lot to learn.

One of the students in my class was being bullied by some older boys. His adolescent life was being made miserable – more miserable than normal by daily experiences of derision. His name was Jaron. One morning, he asked me if his cousin, a local football star at Mackenzie High School, could come and talk to the class. I was delighted at the prospect of fifteen minutes' vacation from the constant "policing" that my teaching had become. His cousin called and we arranged a convenient time. He came to my class, perched on a desk and began talking to the students. At the time, he was being recruited by most of the major college football powerhouses. When someone asked him what he was going to do, he said he was going to Notre Dame because he needed discipline and someone to watch over him and he thought he would find it there.

He started telling those boys and girls who were enthralled by their high school hero that he had not always been successful as an athlete. When he was in elementary school, he wanted to play basketball but was never really very good at it. The same with baseball. He was large for his age at the time and a little overweight, so he began to realize that his potential sport was football. He decided to work at it and become good at it, and he felt fortunate that he had had a good high school experience and



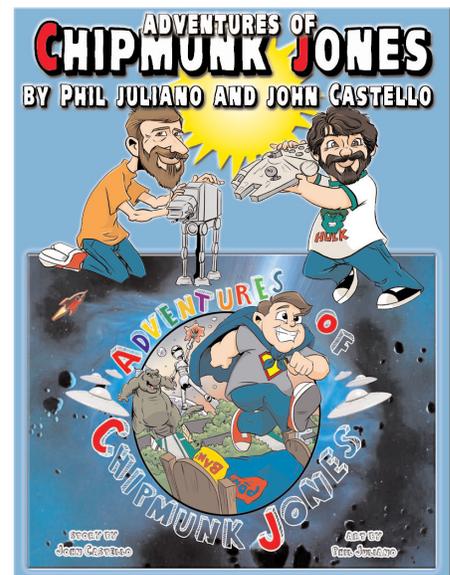
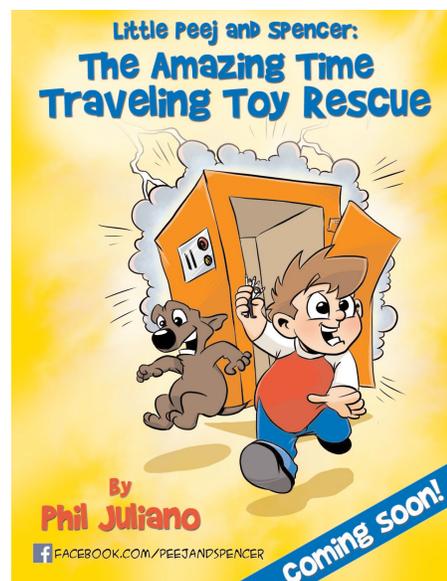
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now was being offered a college education. He told the students that he was aware that there were always opportunities to make money running drugs, but that they had better think long and hard before they opted for that job. They would be dead or incarcerated before they were adults if that became their choice. He encouraged them to find something they could do well, develop their unique talents, study hard and stay in school. Then he did an amazing thing! He looked at me and then turned to the students and said, "See that grey-haired lady over there, your teacher? You'd better listen to her. She knows more than you think."

That day at St. Leo's School, Jerome Bettis gave me the gift of credibility. The students began to listen to me in a new way and with some sort of admiration that they transferred from him to me. His cousin Jaron gained a new respect. And since that time, I have followed the career of a young man who gave me an incalculable gift – clearing the way for me to teach. When I watched "The Bus" during his professional career with the Pittsburgh Steelers, I realized that he was the "devil incarnate" to whatever team was opposing his, but he has always been "God incognito" to me. In 2006, I was living temporarily in New York City where my spouse served as Interim Senior Pastor of Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church. He and I were waiting

for the bus Jerome Bettis walked by. He was talking on his cell phone, but when we called to him, he came over and flashed that famous smile. I reminded him of that time when he came to talk to my class in Detroit. It was clear to me that he did not remember the incident as vividly as I did and it was certainly not as life-changing for him as it was for me, but he was gracious. I told him with all sincerity how proud I was of him and of how

he was using his life and talents to make the world better for so many (he has a foundation that feeds money into the inner-city of Pittsburgh and Detroit to help young people with recreation and education). He smiled and walked away. He has no idea that he validated my call to inner city teaching and gave me the necessary credentials to be believable to those students who taught me more than I ever taught them. ❖



Two new book projects from Blotterfriend and artist Phil Juliano!!

First: 'Peej and Spencer: The Amazing Time Traveling Toy Rescue'. It's a novelized version of the syndicated comic strip, 'Best In Show'. This story touches upon all the typical issues a seven year old has to deal with: bullies, math homework and a little sister. What's different? Our seven year old hero begins his story as a middle-aged comic geek that is so nostalgic for his prized Star Wars toy collection that he devises a way to go back in time to retrieve them. Of course, things don't go according to plan. Expected release date is Winter 2016. Fans can follow along with the project at www.facebook.com/PeejandSpencer.

The second is a collaborative effort titled 'Adventures of Chipmunk Jones' written by John Castello and illustrated by Phil. 'Adventures of Chipmunk Jones' is the story about Chip, a comic loving kid that can't catch a break. He lives with his mom and sister and all he really wants is a best friend and some stability. Chip's story resonates with just about everybody that ever wanted to have friends, fun at school, and catch the pretty girl's eye. Expected release date is October 2016. Check out the GoFundMe page at <https://www.gofundme.com/chipmunkjones>.

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

With a shadow friend, I visit a lodge in the mountains – a special place where many artists live. The lodge sits on the shore of a perfectly square lake. Around the edge of the lake there is a square boardwalk, with a square pavilion above to keep out weather, and a benchlike ledge all around the boardwalk on the water side. Upon this ledge are dozens of miniature houses made out of magazine pages, newspaper, shoe boxes, and book covers; doll-sized paper houses on display, standing in square formation around the square lake.

Each house is unique, because art. Each was made by a different artist. Imagine these artists, toiling away, hunched over their paper houses, wearing magnifying glasses, plying careful tweezers and pinpoints of glue.

We stroll the boardwalk, my shadow friend and I, peering in tiny windows at paper people. At the corner furthest from the lodge I pause. I produce matches. I feel like setting fires, I say.

I set paper houses alight: one, two, three, four, five. Five works of art painstakingly made by careful artists. My shadow friend and I return casually to the lodge. Five houses burn.

The fires have been spotted; uproar among the artists. The curator of the paper houses hurries past, eyes wide, aghast.

My shadow friend and I know nothing of this crime. No, we didn't see anyone. Of course, it *is* very dangerous, a fire this time of year, what with all the heat, the tinderbox forest.

Annie S, dream arsonist

“The Percentage Game”

by Gerald Withers

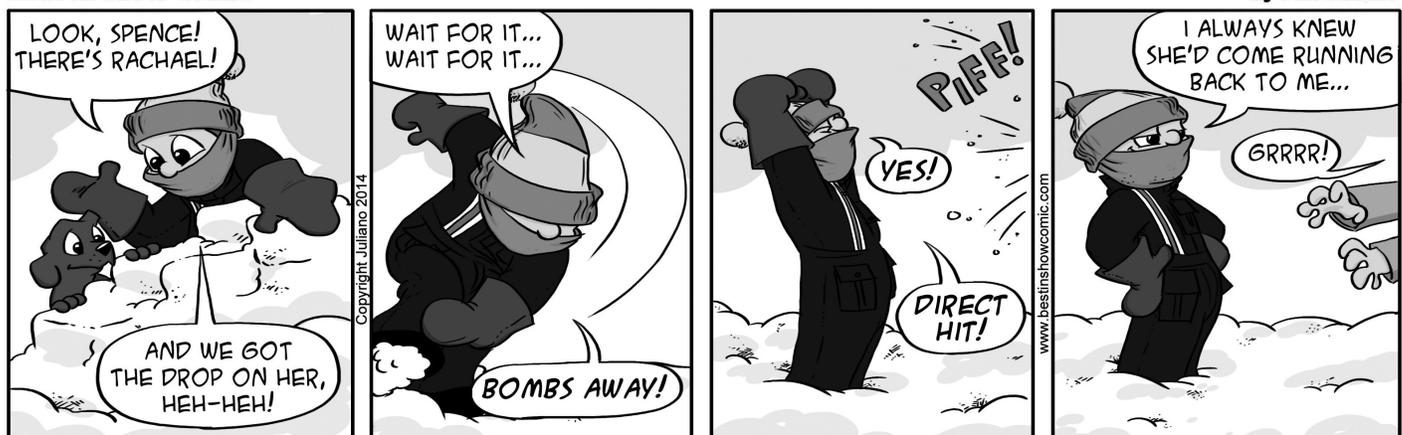
The ABV of a bottle of Luxco Everclear is 75.5%. It sounds like a lot, sure. It sounds like a lot more when you're on your fourth cup of it. You're drinking this stuff, with its 75.5% ABV, because maybe you just broke up with your girlfriend. That vicious one, the one named after a beer (good luck trying to order a Miller Lite after that). Or maybe, you just got your first failing grade in college, and you don't know how it happened. You were sure—let's say, 75.5% sure—that you would pass. You rarely felt like going to class, but you did all the online assignments, and you were there for every test at least. But you failed. Or maybe, it's the day after your roommates moved out, and you have only a few weeks to find a new place to live. You're all alone, alone with the bottle of Everclear, a leftover

from the party you were at the night before. It's 75.5% empty, but there's enough in there for just you—no roommates, no girlfriend. Just you. The liquor makes you feel better up to a certain point. Then worse. You wake up the next day feeling like there's sludge in the gears, a headache you brought on yourself for once. You glance around the \$800-a-month apartment, which is empty, save for you. You put the pillow over your head. You're 75.5% sure that you can't do this.

Booker's Bourbon is upscale. It's \$65, and 65% ABV. You buy it to commemorate moving in with your best friend. The apartment is farther away from school than the last one, all the way across town. It's also more expensive than the last place you were living, and Tyler isn't the best with money. But neither are

you—you just bought a \$65 bottle of bourbon. It'll be alright, you tell yourself. It's more expensive, sure, but you have a better job now, and Tyler makes more money than your last roommates combined. He'll be good for the money. You're farther from school, yeah, but maybe a change of scenery will help you focus better. It won't affect your grades. You're 65% sure these concerns are nothing to worry about, so you shrug them off and unlock the door to your new apartment. It's empty, except for the TV you moved in first thing. You place the bourbon and the solo cups on the floor, sit down next to them, and lean against the back wall. Tyler puts a movie in the Playstation as you pour a couple shots. He sits next to you, grabs his shot, and the two of you toast to things to come.

Best In Show Comic



by Phil Juliano

The Blotter

Anchorman 2 lights up the dark living room, and the bourbon warms your chest as the two of you keep drinking and laughing. You're 65% sure things couldn't be better.

There are a lot of 100 proof (50% ABV) vodkas out there. You're unsure of what kind is in your drink as you sip your Moscow Mule. You don't care for vodka, and you don't care for 50%—make it a higher percentage so it knocks you around a bit more, or make it lower so that it tastes better. 50% is just unpleasant. Tyler is across the table from you, yammering to Nathaniel and Anthony about his upcoming decision. He's had more than you, so he's in that talkative state he gets in after drinking too much. His says it's about 50/50. He's got a lot of

thinking to do. He knows it's a big choice. He doesn't want to leave Rock Hill. But he's always wanted to join the Air Force. He doesn't want to give up on the band. But he doesn't feel like he's going anywhere in life. He's already talked to the recruiter. Things are moving quickly, he says. A 50/50 shot sounds generous to you. You know how Tyler is. You know when his mind is made up. He may not be around for the last couple months of the lease, he admits. "Unless we get signed by a label," he says with a laugh. You smile. "I'd give it a 50/50 shot," you joke.

Kraken Rum is 47% ABV. You can't stand the taste of it anymore, but it was one of the first things you and Tyler ever drank together. You were older, and you had a beard, so it wasn't hard to get once you hit 19. It didn't always work—in fact, it worked probably a little less than half the time, maybe 47% of the time—but that was often enough to keep you and Tyler

happy. You had to know the right liquor stores to try, and Tyler would keep the car running in case somebody said they were going to call the cops. Nobody did, so far as you guys knew, and you'd usually walk out with a bottle, anyways. Once you started college, you'd get a handle of Kraken for every party you threw. It was a staple. This was back in the first place you lived, the one next to campus. Back when Zac and Tyler would get drunk and crash on the couch three or four days a week. You see Zac 47% as often now. And Tyler is leaving. So your friends are throwing an "old school" party to send him off. With Kraken. You bought a bottle, unaware that at least two other people had already done the same. Tyler's leaving. The night goes by quickly, even though nothing particularly fun happens. Somebody made a playlist of songs, songs that you all used to listen to, songs that you wrote together. It's all back-

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ground noise to you. You take shots of Kraken, make Kraken and Coke, drink Kraken from the bottle. Your stomach hurts, and your head is buzzing in that unpleasant way it does when you've had too much liquor to be comfortable, but not enough to pass out. You sit on the floor of the bathroom, waiting to throw up. Outside, you hear Tyler talking about his decision. "I can be retired by the time I'm 40," he says. "It's just the kind of opportunity I've always wanted," he explains. "I'll have plenty of free time to come visit, too," he assures. You've heard this rehearsed speech before. You hear the others try to convince him to stay. "You made this decision really quick, dude," they say. "What if it's not what you're expecting?" they ask. "You could always just get a two-year degree or something," they offer. You've made the same argument they're making before. A choice is a choice, and he made one, you tell yourself. The urge to

vomit finally comes, and you do so. Once you're done, you lean against the back wall of the bathroom. A few tears cool down your hot face. Tyler is leaving. And you're not even 47% sure of what comes next.

Months have passed, and you sit alone in your new two-bedroom apartment. It's new, but it's in the same complex as the apartment you lived in before you lived with Tyler. It's two-bedroom, but you have no roommate. You have a loveseat, but it isn't big enough for anyone to crash on, and nobody sits next to you at the moment. A movie is on—background noise as you drink. But you drink alone now. Nathaniel left an 18-pack of Coors Light the night before. You guys had intended to drink most of them, but didn't. The majority of them now sit in your fridge, and you're slowly but surely making your way through them. Coors Light is 4.2% ABV. It's pathetic. It's the stuff you would drink to

wind down after a round of shots and a slew of mixed drinks. But it's all you have right now. Tyler is probably running a mile right now. Or maybe he's being yelled at by a drill sergeant. Maybe he's making new friends in the cafeteria. And you're here, drinking 4.2% beer. You keep cracking cans. You drink almost all the beer, the cans rattling at your feet every time you adjust yourself on the couch. You feel bloated. You hate drinking beer to get drunk. Tyler probably won't be allowed to drink for months. He'll probably have three square meals a day. Maybe he'll even have a curfew. You drink until the early morning, and then fall asleep on the loveseat. You wake up a few hours later, with a mixture of rocks and bits of glass rattling inside your skull. Today's the day you'll figure out what you're doing, you tell yourself. Tonight's the night you go without a drink, you promise. You know there's roughly a 4.2% chance you're telling the truth.



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“I cry and my children stare”

as if I am in pain.

I cry at films I've seen before, all over again,

Even before those scenes begin

that first invoked the waterworks:

Homer alighting from the taxi,

knowing he cannot hug his girl.

The Roman soldier getting all tough with Batiatus,

because Spartacus will see his infant son.

During the King's hesitant words, backed by Beethoven's Seventh.

My tears flow for all I know that Britain will face in '40.

I cry at Mr. Sandburg's poems,

and Mr. Yeats and Mr. Hall.

I cannot read some words aloud at all

in classrooms laden with students eager

to hear those choking thoughts.

I am rendered silent, useless.

They do not yet discern how to react:

to soothe, ignore, just walk away clueless.

Ah, me, I weep at lines not even about loss nor chance missed.

My vision smears and I cannot wipe

without bringing my issue to the attention

of the coffee shop full of caffeinated sippers glaring

at laptops and teens tapping smartphones

trying to glean some fine point

from glittering screen.

I cry in the shower, nostalgically fragrant soap in my eyes,

let the stinging heat roll

that no one need witness nor explain.

Because I'm old, because it's Tuesday,

because we won or because we lost.

Because you're here my heart breaks,

because you're gone, my heart breaks.

Because I could not stop for death, or love or hope,

or perhaps because I will.

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tobacco and lighter implements. It's also where I sneaked my first smoke, finding an old cigarette, lighting it with the lighter and puffing smoke into my mouth, catching it in my cheeks – not inhaling. It was enough. What a terrible taste! But I thought it had to be an adult thing – like enjoying the bitter of coffee. I liked the smell of cigarettes and lighter fluid, and the perfume of newly brewing coffee. And the pong of old whiskey at the bottom of a tumbler on Saturday morning after a cocktail party.

There were also oddities in Dad's dresser. A pair of warm woolen long-johns, from the war. Many days I played outside in the deepest winter without getting as cold as my friends, wearing those long-johns. And a woven wool skull-cap – you pulled it over your head and it hung down on your chest and back like a knight's chain mail – a balaklava it was called. There were also Marine-green button down shirts, also from Dad's time in the Navy and an overcoat with an itchy fur collar, also Marine-green, that zipped up the front. It was Dad's favorite winter coat for going out and shoveling snow – and when I was big enough I used to ask him if I could use it. Eventually, I took it over, wearing it to school or out to play from autumn through winter and into early spring. It got a lot of use, that old coat.

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Gerald Withers of Rock Hill, SC writes, "I just recently finished obtaining my BA in creative writing at Winthrop University, and this would be my first publication. Much of my work deals with my experience with chronic pain, anxiety, depression, and the stagnation one might feel when faced with those issues. This piece in particular reflects the loss of the stabilizing force that comes when a close friendship ends, or changes."

Phil Juliano of Minneapolis, MN, is a good Blotterfriend. Follow his adventures on philjulianoillustration.com (and check out his current projects on page 9.)

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