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magazine



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[c l m p]

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“Magnificent Anachronism”

I’m pretty sure I’m not alone when it comes to finding anachronism akin to literary/historical fingernails on a chalkboard. But I do suspect that we’re a small club, not particularly chatty and all behind on our dues. This is probably because we’re all tired of being called know-it-alls, or being asked if we tried out to be on Jeopardy. I know I am. OK, it has happened twice, and the first time it was because I was shouting the answers at the TV without putting them in the form of a question.

Which I hate. Not being told to put it in the form of a question, but that we all still think that this is a necessary part of the game. Because it’s been around a while (the game) and we all get it (those of us who watch it) and it’s a silly rule and time to kill it off. Come on – Major League Baseball actually ended the intentional walk, for crying out loud. What is “if baseball can do it, you can, Alex?”

Anachronisms aren’t even fun to write about. I can list some that crossed my radar, first researched by Heinrich Hertz in the 1880s. By the way, “Hertz” is the term for the measurement of radio wave frequency, and a Hertz is defined as one cycle per second. Interesting, right? However it was Robert Watson-Watt who put radar to use detecting the distance of incoming airplanes (in 1915!) so that it was his developments that led to the equipment used in the Battle of Britain in 1940. But it wasn’t called radar. It was called Radio Direction Finding. Radar is an acronym for RADio Direction And Ranging – coined by the US Navy. In 1940. In the US. Hmm.

I know, I know – who cares? We who read historical fiction care. All seventeen of us.

To understand how we feel, think about making a recipe from a cookbook, and discovering that the author mislabeled tablespoons “Tsps.” After you’ve put the cake in the oven. Or someone singing your favorite Chance the Rapper song and screwing up the lyrics. Because they cannot screw up the tune. Because there isn’t one. Yeah. (Yeah, yeah...you know you should be glad.)

Or imagine going somewhere you've never been before and only having a map with no street names, or the wrong ones, or someone reading them out to you incorrectly. Yes, it's Peachtree Street. I mean Peachtree Court. I mean Peach Orchard Court. (Yeah, talk about ancient history. Maps!)

Well, perhaps your GPS is telling you to go down a side street because it's shorter, even though that takes you off the highway and doesn't really show how many speed bumps there are (one at each intersection and one each around every curve. Those damned teenagers with their hot-rods!

So when I read (present or past tense – it doesn't matter, really) a book about George Patton taking Dramamine for his motion sickness, well, it's...irritating. Because I know that the medication that eventually became Dramamine was invented in the early 20th century as an antihistamine, and only later when it was found to have motion sickness remediation qualities was it available as an over the counter pill.

In 1949. After Patton was dead.

Yes, I suppose this sort of thing happens all of the time – in film and on TV. The wrong guitar being played in 1955. A wristwatch on an Earl in some- Abbey- or-other. Incorrect clothing styles and colors for the time periods. Question: does the complete disregard of actors in the 1960s for having proper haircuts in their roles as soldiers and sailors during World War II, Roman centurions, Elizabethan courtiers, or pre-historical cavemen bother you? It does me. But I tell myself soothingly that it is just film, and they seem to be getting it right nowadays. All of the haircuts from galaxies some number of longs ago and multiple fars away seem appropriate for their gender, class, age, and/or species. Bravo. Keep up the fair-to-middling work.

But more is expected from authors of historical fiction. It is, after all, a great portion of the point. Historical fiction is constructed on pertinent details. James Michener's epic "Centennial" – a lush tale of the many states (and State) of Colorado – lavishly spent three pages explaining how a young British Royal saved the American beaver from extinction one windy London day. It seems that an errant gust toppled a favorite beaver skin topper into the street, scuffing it beyond repair, which emboldened him to try one of the newfangled

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CAUTION

If you're happy and you know it, clap

an excerpt from the novel "Masters In This Hall"

by Martin K. Smith

The *California Zephyr*, over three hours late, persevered across Illinois at its standard 79-miles-per, lumbering along like a dinosaur trying to hurry. The coaches had the faint stale atmosphere of their three days' journey from Oakland. Passengers had colonized the seats with the usual detritus of pillows and overcoats, GameBoys and iPads, cardboard trays from the café car, dismembered newspapers from Sacramento, Reno, Salt Lake City, Denver. The fields blurring past were muddy, the roads glistening wet; the eastern horizon was one long wall of cloud, shading from dark grey down to indigo, and with split-second flicks of lightning. Whispered rumors of tornado alerts could be overheard while passing through the cars. Rick tried to not keep looking at his phone. Every minute they lost tightened his 6:40 connection to the *Capitol Limited* out of Chicago, and the *Zephyr's* steward still had no word on whether it would be held for them.

He dreamed about Aidan that afternoon, as the train racketed eastward. Aidan, leaning over him, saying "Wake up; we're almost there." They'd left Aurora and were racing through the outer suburbs, at "one-hundred-ten per," Aidan proudly said. They were no longer on the Amtrak *Zephyr*, with its lurching double-deck Superliners, but on the original *California Zephyr*, the gleaming streamliners built in 1948 by Budd of Philadelphia, where each car's name was prefixed with "Silver." They wandered through a few: *Silver Vision*, *Silver Future*, *Silver Society*, *Silver Sustainability*. Aidan was in heaven, talking about everything: heavy welded rails and advanced suspension keeping their motion smooth, dome cars now with wheelchair lifts, ADA-compliant sleeper rooms...Aidan the ultimate train-history nerd, who wasn't even born until decades after the old *Zephyr* had been retired, but knew every detail down to the choices on the dining-car menus...The suburbs speeding past looked surprisingly rural; there were open fields, groves almost big enough to be part of a forest; the houses on larger lots, with chicken runs, extensive vegetable gardens; – wait, was that a cow? Solar panels glinted on countless roofs. Even as the neighbor-

*** Trump: Researchers trapped in Antarctic ice prove global warming is a sham; tweets " this very expensive



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NIGHTSOUND
STUDIOS



hoods grew shabbier near downtown, with housing projects and burnt-out or boarded-up buildings, he saw community gardens and homemade playgrounds in vacant lots, old factories repurposed as solar farms, and many of the derelict structures aswarm with workers rebuilding. Past the freight yards and Western Avenue station; sailing over the Chicago River, slowing past State Street control tower with its Escher-like steel maze of switches; round the graceful descending ramp into Grant Park Station's lower level. The platforms were just the right height to walk straight out from the train; no clambering baggage-laden down steep metal steps. Redcaps and free luggage carts waited on the broad platform, where at the north end a choice of pedestrian ramp or moving sidewalk led up into the high-clerestoried Arrivals concourse and its baggage-claim carousels. One o'clock: right on schedule. He could get a late lunch at the Berghoff and still have plenty of time to make the 4 pm *Carolina Special*...

He woke. They were at Chicago but not in the station yet; they were sitting just west of the yards, probably waiting for a signal. The other passengers were already gathering coats, laptops, leftovers and children, or getting in each others' way as they tried to maneuver suitcases down off the racks. Rain was coursing down the windows, blurring streetlights into fractal stars and the skyline to an Impressionist painting. His phone said 6:02. The steward's voice on the intercom was announcing that "all passengers traveling on connecting trains would please meet with an Amtrak Passenger Services Representative inside the station."

An outbound suburban train rumbled past. The commuters crowded inside, beneath bright fluorescent light behind tinted rain-wet windows, seemed like travelers in space capsules. Once it had gone the *Zephyr* jolted forwards, to creep round the northward curve and into the subterranean tracks of Union Station. Then more confusion and delay, as everyone sought to make their way down the narrow corkscrew center stair to the lower-level door, there to join the river of travelers already flowing up the platform, narrow and puddled and randomly asphalt-patched, with rent-a-cart machines and massive columns impeding; past the deafening roar of the locomotives and into the concourse: a scene chaotic and disheartening, like evacuees fleeing Godzilla. The station TVs, inaudible in the rush-hour uproar, were reporting something about tornadoes in the North

WARMING bullsh*t has got to stop" *** Earth set to warm "catastrophic" 4 degrees by end of century *** Water

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Shore suburbs, along with another multi-twister outbreak in seven states from Texas to Georgia; the fifth one that year, with an aggregate death toll cresting three hundred. All the trains to and from Milwaukee were marked DELAYED. Rick talked to the Passenger Services rep, a drained-looking woman in Amtrak garb, who directed him through another gate to where the *Capitol* waited, hissing steam. It pulled out soon after he boarded.

The rain was still coming down. On a city street bridging the tracks there'd been an accident, a scene of arc-bright lights strobing blue, red and white, and cops moving hunch-shouldered in yellow slickers. Everybody up there must've been getting soaked, poor bastards...So there'd been a fifth mega-tornado attack. The weather kept getting more and more extreme, but politicians like Dad *still* didn't want to admit global warming. Just another one of those frustrating fucked-up things you couldn't do much about, except vote and sign occasional petitions and hope for the best. The kind of thing that would've had Aidan, poor tormented run-away Aidan, in a fit of passion. ("Why do you care about it so much?" you'd ask. And through his tears he'd scream back "BECAUSE NOBODY ELSE DOES!!!") Everybody saying, "the whole thing's gonna collapse, our civilization's gonna destroy itself" – while in the meantime, things like Amtrak kept struggling on, still running trains; maybe not on time, but still running...

Once the porter and conductor had come for his ticket, he pulled out his phone. Mom answered. "Hey, kiddo! How's it going?"

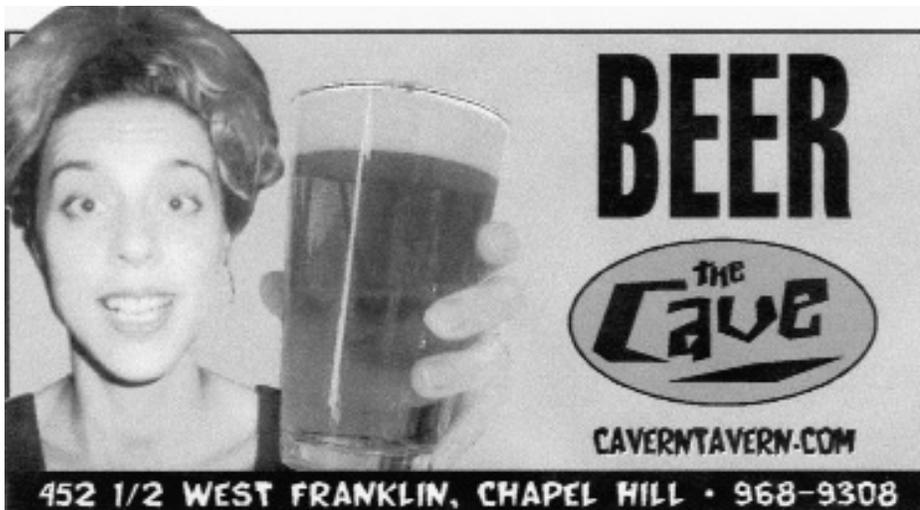
"We just left Chicago. We're about twenty minutes late, but they say I shouldn't have any trouble making the Washington connection. Thanks for the upgrade." His tickets had been coach, but she'd paid the extra for a sleeper compartment.

"It's the least I could do. How was the interview?"

"It went OK. I don't think they were happy with me not having much teaching experience, but they were still friendly." The job, teaching English at Creighton University in Omaha, was a long shot; but these days any job application was a long shot. "Nothing to do now but wait."

"Wait and hope; it's all you can do. I don't suppose you saw any sign of Aidan."

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“Nothing. Not from anybody I talked to either. I figured that was a long shot too.”

“Yeah; long shots are usually just that. But, anything to help Eunice feel people are still trying.”

Aidan had now been gone for a year. The SBI had confessed, privately to Dad, that it would have considered the case stone-cold; except that every few months, another Polaroid would arrive in the mail. Each one showed him in a different locale: smiling against a backdrop of snow-capped mountains; running with arms joyfully spread across a prairie; pointing over a wide river; shirtless and up to his waist in ocean surf; in a wooded clearing, with a fire pit, log benches and a scatter of drums behind him. The pictures, implying Aidan’s continued existence, had enabled Dad to pull some favors with the school board and get Gil Johnson back from his “administrative leave.” Randy Hewitt, meanwhile, had returned to school. Lin didn’t bother, as he’d been set to graduate, and start at East Carolina in the fall; Dad had also arranged for him to receive his diploma without having to be present. Kayleigh Werthan remained at the private academy in New Jersey where she’d been hidden, and was said to be delighting in its easy access to Manhattan. Her father had been persuaded by his lawyers to not sue anybody.

When Rick told Dad and Eunice about his upcoming trip, Eunice begged him to go by train. Aidan was traveling, out there somewhere; maybe, just maybe, he was riding the trains he so loved. Even though there weren’t any trains in the pictures – or cars, or other people, or roads, buildings, landmarks, anything that might give away a clue. No letters accompanied them, no notes were written on the back, no return address on the envelopes; and as best as the Post Office could trace, they’d been dropped in random mailboxes on quiet suburban streets, far from any security cams. (And Polaroids?? Where the hell was he getting Polaroid film? The cameras themselves hadn’t been made for years.) Eunice was willing to clutch after the frailest of straws and longest of long shots. (She continued to leave Aidan’s bedroom light on and table place set.) Rick agreed to train travel, with Aidan’s picture to show and ask, “have you seen him?”

“I feel sorry for her,” he told Mom. The rain had stopped, and dusk was falling. The train raced past freight after westbound freight, as the steel mills of Hammond flared their unearthly fires. “He was always her ‘baby.’ And I think that’s part of the problem. He didn’t want to be ‘my baby’ any more. But she wouldn’t listen.”

“I know. Poor gal,” Mom repeated. “She really needs some kind of support group.”

“In Grantsville??”

“But you know they’ve got runaway kids even there...Even if they did it through their church. It’d give her something positive to do...”

“Yeah; but who’s gonna try and persuade her: me or you?...Anyway, they just called my din-

long-term unemployed *** "Bring back child labor!"- Maine Gov. Paul LePage says lowering state's working-age

ner seating. You know with a sleeper car your meals are included?”

“No kidding. Wow! Living it up. Have a steak for me.”

“Maybe I will. Bye; I’ll call you tomorrow night. Love you.”

“Love ya too, kiddo. Wait, wait – something I want to ask you.”

“What?”

Her voice lowered. “(Gee, how should I put it?)...Have you had, like, any particularly weird dreams recently; like in the past couple nights? About wizards.”

“Wizards?? No. That’s a particularly weird question, Ma. Like what; and why?”

“Never mind. Some story I saw online. It’s too long to explain.”

“Coming into Chicago today I dreamed Aidan and I were on one of his historical trains, and he was showing me all around, acting proud as if he’d designed it. But that’s not particularly weird.”

“I’ll tell you about it when you get back. Go eat your steak.”

“I will. Say hi to Annie.”

The steward agreed to circulate Aidan’s photo amongst the waiters and kitchen staff. None recalled seeing him, though a few remembered his disappearance. The porter had already made up the bed when he returned, and as he’d had to get up way early to catch the *Zephyr*, he decided to turn in early too.

That night he did dream of a Wizard, and of Aidan again. His consciousness rose from deep sleep into the dream. He knew it was a dream, for he could still feel the motion of the speeding train beneath him, and distantly hear the constant mournful call of its horn. He was in another historic train, in one of those single-person “roomettes” they used to have. The bed pulled down from the wall behind his seat. An Art Deco lamp was fixed by its head, lozenge-shaped with frosted lenses at top and bottom, and a toggle switch. Flipped up, the top lens was a reading light; flicked down, the bottom lens held a blue night light. Tiny slot-like closets were built into the side walls, and a stainless-steel sink could be folded down from the opposite end wall. A little circular fan perched at the top corner of the high ceiling, like a benign gargoyle set to keep watch. He felt comfortable, tucked away beneath warm blankets in the tiny space; cozy and safe and reassured, feeling he was in good hands: of the engineer, the conductor, the operators in control towers flashing past; and of the dispatchers in some faraway central hub, a large windowless room full of lighted track diagrams and banks of switches, humming with a sense of competent seriousness like NASA Mission Control.

The window shade was up, showing daylight outside. They were passing a broad lawn that sloped gently down to the tracks; and there, in the shade of a great oak, stood The Wizard. As in “Wizard of Oz,” from the movie; and there was Dorothy, and / or Judy Garland, in a group of

requirements will help state's economy *** Glenn Beck: "Bill Nye's fight against creationism like Catholic Church's

women sitting or laying on the grass listening to him. In her Garland aspect she'd cleaned up off all the drugs and hysteria and was now in a happy strong spiritual place. She waved to Rick. Beside her, Ava Gardner (one of Mom's favorite actresses) gave him a sultry wink. And wasn't that Lucy and Susan from the *Narnia* movies, and Hermione from *Harry Potter*? A figure in Biblical robes was Mary Magdalene, something kept telling him.

Aidan was standing beside the Wizard. He held a paperback the size of a phone book, whose title in Victorian letters read "THE OFFICIAL GUIDE OF THE RAILWAYS" round a display of six clock faces depicting Standard Time across the country. Rick's train was rolling past in slow motion. He looked at The Wizard. Their eyes met. The Wizard tipped his hat, in as gracious and friendly a manner as could be; and placed an approving hand on Aidan's shoulder. "He's doing an excellent job."

He was awakened by inertia dragging at him. The train was grinding to a sudden halt, brakes wailing and groaning underneath. He parted the curtains but could see nothing: an ink-black silhouette of treeline barely distinguishable against an equally black night sky. Footsteps hurried past in the corridor, with urgent staticky voices from a train-crew radio. "...*Negative, 29, he's waiting at Berea; this thing's right on top of you, Track Three westbound...*" A shaft of approaching light materialized, illumining rails, ties and trackside underbrush. The throbbing sound of diesel engines grew. Then the dazzling glare of the headlight blazed, and the other train was passing them.

It was another old "streamliner," the front of the engine rounded in Art Deco curves. The cars were marked "BALTIMORE & OHIO." Coaches with drawn shades and dim-lit vestibules; lounge with shaded lamps and a spotlit counter where bottles and glassware gleamed; bright diner with empty tables, already set for breakfast; more shade-drawn windows. Several cars had glassed-in observation rooms on top. The last car was another cozy, sleepy lounge, with windows at the rear and a lighted sign below them. Twisting round in his berth, he was almost able to read it: "(something) – OL LIMITED."

His train sat there for what seemed like ten minutes. Nothing happened. There were no more hurrying footsteps or radio voices. Finally he heard the engine blow two sharp notes on its horn, and they creaked into motion again. ❖

war on Galileo" *** Monsanto killing monarch butterflies: numbers in decline due to agriculture conglomerate's

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

When I dream about Dad he is around fifty, which places most of my dreams in the time just before we moved from my childhood home. Those were weird times for me, trying to grow up, trying to learn, trying to not be beaten up by bullies, etc., so it makes sense that if I'm having turmoil-filled or nostalgic dreams, they might take place in that framework. Maybe they were a little strange for you two, too. But that's not really the point, here. Rather, our childhood was placid for the most part (at least in hindsight – seeing other friends' childhoods through the lens of my 60 year old mind), and full of wonder for me, even with my petty problems with school, bullies, shyness, nightmares, et al. In other words, the good is so much more than that bad.

My dreams – are a way to do more than revisit the past. It is a way to fulfill that wish we (??) have to do something more than we actually did back in the day. I wish I could have sat with Dad and had a cup of coffee with him while he read the paper. I wish I would have helped him with his wine cellar, or working in the yard, or any of his hobbies. Would that have been possible, as a kid, or even a teenager? No – I know that. Dad wasn't a sharing tasks kind of person. Even when he worked with Uncle Dick and Uncle Bob in the garage grinding grapes or some other winemaking step, he wasn't really collaborating. They were each doing their own thing – together. Not the same thing. And when he did photography, or film, or some chore around the house or some special function for school or Adult Ed., or church or, later, with choir or the Singers' Guild, he was actually doing his own thing with others around him.

So in my dreams I get to participate. I get to sit downstairs in the wine cellar without being in the way. Or ride with him to Roselle Park to turn in a movie and take out a new one for showing against the Columbia School gym wall, without being a burden. I get to help paint the side of the house the garish red we loved so much, without being underfoot. I'm allowed to try and be helpful - raking up the mown grass and wheeling it over to the compost pile behind the garage. I get to watch a ballgame with him on TV, or go fishing and play poker with him at Beaver Lake – and not be in the way. But don't get me wrong – he never told me I was a burden, or in the way, or an annoyance. He was just that kind of man; in his own world doing his own things. No harm done that we never...played catch. And even though he comes out far ahead of other dads (in anecdotal evidence as told to me by other sons) I still don't use that as a unit of measure of success, because it is irrelevant. He was a good dad without the need to compare him.

How was he good? He was honest and faithful and forthright and peaceful. He was sober (inasmuch as

we use that word to mean not out-of-control, either naturally or by artificial means) when others weren't. He was dedicated to those things he found important – teaching, church, family. One could use the word “invested.” And he sacrificed (financially) for the long haul because he was in it for the long haul. Again, we could compare him to other contemporaries and he would win, but we don't have to. His actions stand alone on their own. He was tough, but kind. People liked him, or respected him, or both. At the very least, no one looked askance at him.

And was there a little bit of magic in him? I think so. His brain was better than most people's, if we consider his ability to learn things, do things he learned, pass that learning on to others. He could recall facts, information, dates/places/people. He could assimilate new information into his “databanks” for correlation to information he already had. Was it perfect? No, no one's databanks are perfect. But his were mighty, mighty. And I think his tough-teacher, slightly absent-minded exterior, and also devil-may-care outlook endeared him to many, many people. He wasn't self-righteous – he was full of truths. He wasn't pompous – he was really smart. He wasn't full of hot air – he was a storyteller. If you didn't like those qualities, well, OK then. No skin off his back.

In my dreams his hair is still brown-black, his cheekbones high and clean-shaven. His eyebrows are raised in a thoughtful question and there are no reading glasses on his nose. He is wearing a short sleeved shirt and khakis, and hush-puppy shoes and is sitting at the kitchen table, or on the porch stairs, or leaning over the wheel of a VW bus. Sometimes a cigarette is in the corner of his mouth, or not. He is reading, or puttering, or going somewhere or coming home. He is smiling or laughing – to himself or with others, it doesn't matter. He is nibbling a handful of salted nuts, or digging into a Dagwood sandwich, or sipping dark red wine from a juice glass. He is petting a cat or settling back in his chair after changing the TV channel or radio station. He is sitting next to Mom while they listen to music and pass the newspaper across to each other. They are working the crossword puzzles. The best part about my dreams is I get to be me – now – looking backwards wistfully. In my dreams Dad asks me how my day is going, or what I did last weekend, or what I'm reading. Do I have a minute while he reads me something? Yes, I do. Would I like to go surfcasting tomorrow, if the weather holds? Do I want to make myself a sandwich? Would I like to watch the game?

Sure, I would. Sure, I would.

GS - Chapel Hill, NC

“Coming Clean”

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Episode 2 - The Doctor:

30 years ago babies born prematurely before 24 weeks did not survive. They just didn't. They might be born alive but despite heroic, expensive efforts they all died leaving in their wake monstrous bills and shattered emotions.

Jane Doe came in to labor and delivery at 21 weeks in full on labor. She knew it was way too early for the baby to live. She couldn't face this type of loss. Who could? Hysterical, she was praying that the baby would not survive the birth process, was praying that it would be still born. At least death would be accomplished.

It wasn't. The baby was born kicking and scratching and squeaking, its mouth wide open, gasping, looking like a hungry hatchling bird. The baby was placed on the warmer. It squeaked from time to time in its death throes. Jane was hysterical. “Was that the baby?! Is it alive?! I don't want it to be alive!! You told me it would die being born! It's alive isn't it?!”

“No, sweetheart”, said the nurse, blocking the view of tiny, squirming newborn, her back to Jane, facing me. “The baby is gone. It didn't survive being born.” It did, but it was certainly dying. It was just a question of how many minutes. Standing opposite the nurse He looked into her eyes and she into his. He looked over her shoulder through several strands of her now frazzled hair at the sobbing mother. He took one finger and gently lifted the tiny chin, closing the baby's mouth, holding it closed until the tiny, translucent, flexible chest stopped heaving, until the inevitable finally was a truth.

Mercy? The right thing? The wrong thing? Condemnable? Laudable?

With all due respect, it seemed like the thing to do at the time. Still, it's sand in his shoes.

anonymous, via e-mail

“The Morality of the Playground - in sixty-six semi-random questions”

by Sonny Rag

How do you confront aggression? With aggression? Or with calm speech? Why? Have you experienced success in calming aggression with calm speech?

What if there is no useful response to your calm speech – how do you plan to continue? Retreat? What do you do when you can retreat, but others cannot? Do you let them be beaten up? Or do you place yourselves between aggressor and potential victim? What do you do when you are the target of the aggression but if you run away someone else will become the new target? Will you stay behind

with the others? Is this passive, or do you see that as brave?

Would you let yourself be beaten up if in doing so some greater good would result? Would you always put yourself between someone being beaten up and those trying to do so, no matter the reason? Even if it means that they, whomever they are, beat you up instead of their original target? Would you continue to do so in some sort of situation where the person who was going to be beaten up doesn't know it is going to happen so that your act of prevention or kindness or sacrifice goes unno-

ticed? Also, would you put yourself in harm's way only when you cannot retreat? Is retreat or escape the preferred action? Is recognition?

What do you do when there are no rules for play, but a game is presented to you anyhow? What if the rules say what the point of winning is, but not how to win? Is the plan now, suddenly, *by any means necessary*? Or despite the point of the game, do you occasionally choose not to win – but rather let someone else playing the game (with you or while you also play, depending on what type of game it is) win? Do you

“Who gave these idiots
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A Southern college town and its thriving local music scene, where the music's neither “sacred” nor “profane” so long as it's good...

A lost tape of a beloved band's legendary show...

A record label, poised to break big, which certain people want to be part of - by any means necessary...

Two visitors, whose own music has been muted by regrets over long-ago bad decisions: Chuck McDonough, former grad student, who skipped town after learning things about himself he couldn't face; and Penny Froward, whose attempt to help a friend in danger almost destroyed another woman's life...

A mysterious will by an unknown hand; and murder...

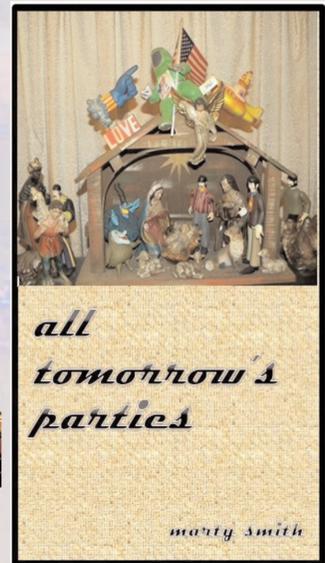
Blotter Books presents:

All Tomorrow's Parties

by Marty Smith

(publisher & book reviewer, “The Blotter Magazine;” contributor to the “Urban Hiker;” former host of “New Frontiers” and “Laugh Tracks” on WXDU - FM, Duke University Radio)

Available in print or e-reader at www.wileequixote.com



The Blotter

feel good, secretly or overtly, that the other person won?

Do you take credit for someone else winning when you don't play to win – because you know or believe that by your inaction there was some causality in their winning?

Do you consider letting the other person win “sharing the victory?” Or does some part of you think of it as “quitting?”

Do you sometimes or always rationalize games as not being important? That they don't really matter, so it doesn't matter whether you win or lose, or how you win or how you lose?

Do you believe in the ideal of “sportsmanship?” or is it an antiquated concept similar to chivalry or honor?

Do you ever cheat? Is it because you cannot win any other way?

Does a cheated game that you win actually count as a victory? Why? Did you win a prize of some sort? Was the prize worth it? What if the prize wasn't worth it, would you never cheat?

Would you cheat if no one knew you were going to cheat, but the prize for winning wasn't worth much? Why not?

Do you think that cheating is a mark of dishonor? That it is a permanent flaw? Do you think that those people who cheat have a permanent flaw in their character?

What if you only cheated once, because at the time it seemed necessary? Can one overcome such a stain on their honor?

What if cheating is an integral part of that particular game?

Well, what if cheating was built into the rules of that game? Would you still play the game?

If you had to play the game, would you play by the rules requiring cheating? Would you lie? Would you lie about cheating? Would you lie about someone else's cheating? Are there such things as “little white lies?”

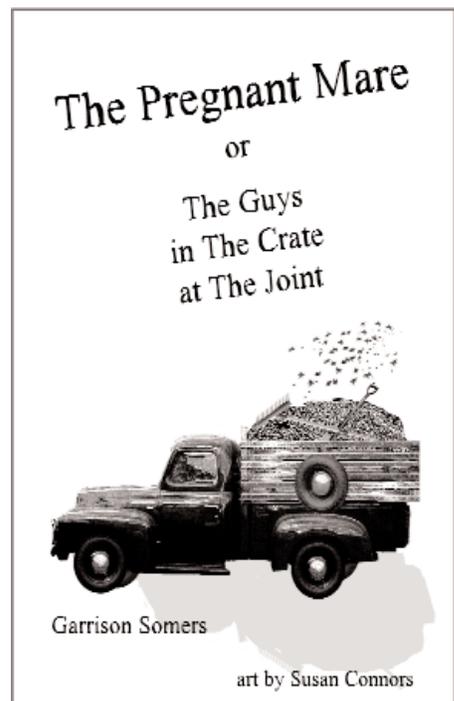
Do you ignore “someone else's business?” When is it OK to lie? Can some people not handle the truth?

So, is life fair? Is “fairness” a factor in whether you will or won't play a particular game? Have you ever lived somewhere else? Was it better or worse than here? If it was worse, did you question the fairness of things when you moved here? Did you do anything differently, or just appreciate the improvement in your

life?

Are all people created equal? Where did you learn that? If so, when do things go wrong, and we become unequal?

Kind of sucks, doesn't it? ❖



On Amazon - of course....

continued from page 3

silk models (available in colors to match the most fickle tastes!) The Brit bought the hat, and all of the style-followers and sycophants followed suit. Or, rather, hat. Suddenly, no more beaver pelts, please, we're British. The big, buck-toothed rodents sighed with relief. And we readers adored the anecdotal connection between history and the narrative. Which is the whole point of that genre, and writing in it.

Enough preaching. If I was speaking to them here and now, and they were even remotely giving me the time of day, I would tell authors of historical fiction (or the strange stepchild sub-genre of steam-punk speculative fiction) that they should be doing every bit of homework necessary to ensure that what may appear to be but the slightest of details is not a stumbling block for the readers of their opus.

All seventeen of us.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

CONTRIBUTORS:

Martin K. "Marty" Smith was born in 1959 and raised in Suburbia (Washington, D.C. followed by Omaha, Nebraska); studied architecture at Kent State University in Ohio; and migrated to North Carolina immediately afterwards. He worked as an architects' draftsman for fifteen years, with intervals as a movie-theater projectionist, census clerk and toy-store salesman. In the meantime he followed his hobbies of reading, writing, hanging out at Chapel Hill live-music venues, volunteer DJ-ing at a college radio station, publishing The Blotter, and concocting bad puns. He frequents open-mics and sometimes records records, under the alias "Coyote vs Acme." findable at ReverbNation and other usual online sources. He and his husband Robin can regularly be found at the Cave in Chapel Hill, or at St. John's Metropolitan Community Church in Raleigh, sometimes within the same 24-hour period.

Sonny Rag throws no discernable shadow, nor does he maintain a viable biography. He anticipates riding a horse along a beach and coming upon the peculiar wreckage of the Statue of Liberty. Pummeling the sand in frustration, he forgets his lines.



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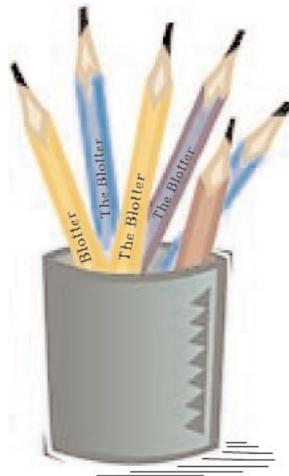
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Hey, you!



Yeah *you*. We said over the years we'd work for food. Writing stories like you've never seen before. Poetry to make you claw out your heart, put it in a pasteboard box and post it to your lovelorn gal. Artwork better than any philistines deserve. Every month like clockwork. *All for you*. But now Daddy needs a new laptop and baby wants a microphone. So you have to ask yourself: can you kick a buck or two to the cause?

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