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The Blotter

magazine



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“I Want To Talk About What I Want To Talk About!”

It is a current bone of contention (with me) here at home that we talk a lot, but not very often is it about something I’m interested in discussing. It’s my fault, I know. After all, things are happening on Next Door. Someone said something to someone else on the most recent phone call or binge-watched drama, but I was a participant in neither, so there is no contextual thread I can latch on to. There’s also the news on TV, but everyone is exhausted with the stress-filled minutae that a twenty-four-hour news cycle brings, so we’re at loose ends with regards to that. It seems to be programmed to eventually enrage, so I find myself walking away when the television is on for that reason.

I sit a lot and read. I scribble, then empty the dishwasher. Walk upstairs, because it’s there, and therefore needs investigating, in the same way that cats wander around a house, peering around corners and under beds. If I bump into my wife or daughters, I don’t interrupt them, because I don’t know what they’re doing and I want to respect any privacy of thought or action they may require in their day. I sit in the bedroom and read something different – my chairs are pre-set with a small stack of books beside them. I hum a song while I read until it annoys even me.

At prescribed, or is it proscribed, moments during the day we interrupt one another with “what’s for lunch?” or “what do you want for dinner?” I don’t know. The inevitable quadrant-chart of questions: What are my choices? Am I cooking? When do you want to eat? What are you hungry for? All leading to the place in a relationship everyone is familiar with – why are you asking me? Just make something.

Meals are fixed, we sit and eat. The talk is about today’s accomplishments or failures, what might or might not happen tomorrow or the next day. I have no plans, have done little of note this day (so far) and have nothing to offer. I listen, but it seems to me that it isn’t important that I do, or maybe it is and I just don’t know how. I mean, I know how to listen, but should I?

Well, we burn up time, and energy, and that’s something. Something good? I can’t say. Does it put wear and tear on us? You bet. We want to be civil to each other, but this is hard. Lockdown, prolonged, has taken a toll on our sensibilities. We eat early, or late. Salads and sliced fruit. Comments include how good this is for our overall health.

Sometimes we skip a meal. So it goes, as the great man said.

I am not looking the gift horse in the mouth, I swear. It is a blessing that we can stay home, as safe as that allows us to be, and let the world bring the bare necessities to us and then some. I have a lifetime supply of fig newtons in one cupboard and nine pounds of peanut butter, so if there's a land war in Asia I'm good for the first few battles. One daughter is in school in my office downstairs, learning organic chemistry. Holy crap, right? The other has an apartment, where this fall she taught herself to crochet while discussing push-and pull marketing strategy in B2B campaigns on Zoom. She'll graduate this summer and we've talked about grad school and internships and she's so much smarter than I am that I feel like she's going to reach over at some point and pat me on the head and say 'there, there. That's a good Dad.'

I am reliably informed (those are trigger words, yeah?) that this will all end at some time in the reasonable future, as such things are measured. I have work to do, creating in the ineffable vacuum of my own making. I can hang in there while hanging out there for a while longer. (Who am I kidding? – this is my wheelhouse. Having very limited human contact is one of my best things. Hey, would you like to talk about my WIP? Got a minute? Can I read something to you?)

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

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in the Great State of Georgia!



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CAUTION

we're so glad you could at

“The Quarantine Action Calendar”

by R. F. Gonzalez

Day 1: Break your baby’s Heart.

Go to the local megastore store. Walk six feet apart while dodging a throng of shoppers who also want the latest anime kitty mask for their daughter. Try not to punch anyone. Hope nobody is as determined about that mask as you are. Fail. There are only dinosaur ones left. After getting home, feed your kiddo a chocolate egg from the Easter egg hunt you didn’t have in the spring. Break the news, break her heart, toss her the dino mask, and exit the room before she bursts into tears.

Day 2: You gotta eat.

Hunger is perpetual. Quarantines do this to people’s stomachs. Go for groceries. Stand in line as the ice cream sandwiches in the cart soften. Wait until the person behind you bangs your hip with their cart. Look back. They’re on their phone and don’t notice your anguished body language. Squish some grapes on the conveyor belt so that everyone’s packaging gets sticky. Really spread it around. They’ll have to dip into their cache of disinfectant wipes. *That’s it*, you think. *Attack their most precious resources – time, money, and health*. Eat one of your daughter’s eggs when you get home to celebrate this little victory.

Day 3: “I’m bored.”

Don’t be bored, you respond. Your kid stares like you’re the god of anti-boredom. Then a back and forth ensues. I miss my friends. Video call them. I miss parks. Let’s play in the yard. I wish we could go to a museum. Let’s virtually tour the Smithsonian. I wish the virus never happened. But it did and here we are alive and well. I want to go back to school. School’s closed. I miss my teacher. I’m your teacher now. She’s better. I know! Her eyes well up and her lip quivers like it’s the end of all things, and I suppose it is for her. An hour later, it begins again. I’m bored.

Day 4: Parks reopen.

Scooter with your kids and watch them stare longingly at other children who are condemned to remain six feet away. Pew-pew, they all say to each other as they zoom by, because emotionally this quarantine has killed them. As you pass a toxic sewer creek, which somehow has thriving fish and turtles and ducks and frogs, you spot a gigantic rat. It must weigh twenty pounds. Screeching to a halt, you whip out your phone and look up *gigantic rat in Texas* and you learn about nutria. You record it for five minutes, pretending to work for a nature show. This nutria is wizened and blind with a gray muzzle.

You’re disgusted and mesmerized at once.

Day 5: Test a theory.

You’ve scootered and jogged past nutria all your life but never noticed them. Tell your kids you’re going nutria hunting at a new park. Yeah! They all shout at once because giant rat hunting is more exciting than sitting at home at this point. Once there, you head right for the drainage pipe and canal full of abysmal muck. No nutria, at first. But then, in the bushes, by some ducks with red knobby skin, you spot a mama nutria and her pups. Another web search reveals they’ve in fact always been around, are impossible to exterminate because they reproduce like crazy, and have several names: mouse beaver, swamp rat, coypu. If the COVID had a spirit animal, it would be nutria. Your life will never be the same.

Day 6: Stay at a hotel.

Home is more like a dungeon these days, so you rent a double queen for the night. Teach your kids what a *staycation* is and watch their faces and expectations sag from disappointment. Then tell them there’s an indoor pool and watch their pink cheeks inflate and eyes bulge from joy. Check in. The room is gritty. Customer service is

dead, you mumble. The kids slam their bodies repeatedly on the beds because their perfectly functional yet neglected trampoline at home is just not good enough for antics. Watch endless ads on cable and smugly reflect on your choice to opt for streaming some years ago. *Cable is dead*, you think, and so is the free market.

Day 7: Relish a swim.

Because the pools were closed all summer. Apparently, this Arnold Schwarzenegger of a virus can beat the shit out of chlorine. Be quirky. Imagine the world's two scariest viruses in a body-building contest. COVID is Arnold, the nutria of movie stars, sporting a tiny polka dotted mankini. Even if Arnold loses this one time (because of the kini), Lou Ferrigno, arch competitor and embodied seasonal flu, will reign. It's lose-lose for the world but you continue with these preposterous visions. Flurrigno is smaller and his muscles appear to be missing a layer or two next to Covidnegger. Flu is still scary because he was the original Hulk after all but doesn't quite make the muscle grade anymore. Covid wins this season and he'll be back! Stop imagining bodybuilding viruses and their muscly counterparts because your kids demand swimming. Now! A sign on the door says, *Due to the pandemic the pool is closed. Closed.* This is the theme of the year. Fun is closed. Laughter is closed. Hope is closed. Life is closed. Every damn thing is closed. So, you check out the same day,

angrily demand a refund, add to the collapse of the economy and freedoms, and go home. Home may be open, but your wallet and heart aren't anymore.

Day 7.5: Press Pause.

Then repeat next week. ❖

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.

My dreams have become more vivid during the lockdown, and my guess is that although there is a lot going on, it is going on without me, so my head is making up for the shortfall.

I often wake up as soon as they are over – played out – and feel as if I've paid my quarter and seen the newsreels and even the serial and am now waiting for the feature presentation.

People I rarely think about when I am awake now populate these strange adventures, in which I understand that I have a charge to complete some task from my past, or from a past similar to my own. It is relieving to my persona to know that I am able to do the job, but also a bit unnerving that it was accomplished long ago and still needs to be revisited. The dream lacks lucidity but makes up for this in the strange glow of realism in color, sound and texture.

If I see a teacher from my past, it is because I – what? – neglected something during my school years? Am I missing a life opportunity? Have I forgotten an essential detail and at risk of making a forgotten mistake? What does my subconscious know that I am not paying proper attention to?

And if I am cast back into my own past, with all of the same experience I have accumulated since then, am I a cheat in this nighttime game? Should I continue make the same choices because they are what a younger, more naïve me would choose? Selecting the same roads, I would travel down them with the eyes of someone aware of what is around the next curve.

Yes and no. I ride the ride, or I design the ride. Each night's entertainment is different, and yet always has one component that is the same – me.

Willoughby - cyberspace

“Fish Rodeo - an excerpt from the novel “The Post-Apocalyptic Dining Guide”

by Joe Buonfiglio

Ed. Note: The Post-Apocalyptic Dining Guide is an absurdist romp through a end-of-days future that none of us wants to consider or, indeed, face, much less with disturbingly dark humor. Nevertheless, author and Blotterfriend Joe Buonfiglio has wandered/stumbled down that rabbit hole and taken us with him, Enjoy this small slice of that trip...

Tommy is just one of those great kids. You know the type: consistently brings home excellent grades, loves science, plays chess and delights in taking me to task on the basketball court. He’s a big kid; tall; already matches my shoe size and will probably be my height or taller by the time you read this. Mere words simply cannot begin to do justice in expressing to you how much I love my son.

Unfortunately, there is an unfathomable, shadowy secret he and I kept from the world. It had long been a source of shame for us both.

Tommy had never been—
I had never—

This isn’t easy. Give me a moment to compose myself.

At the time, Tommy was twelve years old...and I had never taken him fishing.

I know. What kind of rotten father doesn’t take his boy to a lake and drop a baited hook into the water by the time he’s five or six, right? That’s just plain wrong.

Yes, I admit it: I hate to fish. I grew up crabbing on the Jersey Shore. To me, fishing was ordering a grouper sandwich and a cold one if you went on summer vacation somewhere along coastal Florida. Now granted, I’ll readily acknowledge there are worse ways to spend a day than sitting on some lonesome dock or drifting boat, puffing on a nice, fat cigar and putting back a few beers. I have always been okay with “pony fishing” (letting a line sans even a hook blow in the breeze of the end of a pole while you enjoy the contents of a pony keg).

But real fishing? Fishing where you actually try to catch something? Fishing where you have to clean something after you catch it?

NO WAY!

The beasts of stream and pond are far too slimy to hold, live versions of bait are absolutely disgusting when being impaled on a hook, and gutting a fish is just downright

nasty. Not only that, but you can’t be putting back a couple six-packs if you’re out fishing with your five-year-old son; it doesn’t really set a good example. I figure he’ll have enough material involving me to tell his therapist when he’s 40. I don’t need to be adding to that mental stockpile, thank you very much. Besides, fishing without beer? What’s the point?

All of this unsportsmanlike baggage, however, isn’t why I never took my kid fishing. My waistline is substantial enough that an afternoon or two without my favorite non-wine frothy beverage wouldn’t have killed me. The gross factor had nothing to do with it either. Hell, if I could change all those soiled diapers when he was a baby without blowing chunks, fishing would have been a cakewalk. The real impediment to a father-son fishing excursion was, in my defense, not entirely my fault.

With the feel of concrete under his feet most of the time thanks to the bicoastal nature of his father’s work, Tommy grew up hopping between New York and Los Angeles. This was the real roadblock to angling heaven.

Fishing? Where? In our hot tub in Pacific Palisades? On the Promenade in Santa Monica?



Get real.

Oh, I'd occasionally feign my intent to pull a "Hey, Pop, take me to a fishing hole" moment. I remember one Christmas when he was four or five, Santa brought Tommy a "Little Lion's 'My First Fishing Pole'" to place under the tree. I still recall the glee in his eyes at the prospect that he and his old man would soon be sitting at the edge of some expansive body of water, putting back a cold juice box, chatting about the "good old days" when he was 2 and, of course, filling a massive cooler with all the fish we had caught on that sleepy afternoon.

Good times, Dad. Good times.

Two years later, that cute little fishing pole found its way to the thrift store; its original package still unopened. Even so, something changed; radically changed. From the perspective of having an opportunity to go fishing, you might even say something wonderful happened. Due to my accepting a temporary, but long-term writing assignment from a New York publisher wanting an authentic "Taste of the South" best restaurants book by an "embedded" writer... ..we moved to North Carolina.

North Carolina; what excuse could I possibly manufacture for not taking Tommy fishing in North Carolina? God created the Tar Heel State for the sole purpose of giving humans a place to go angling. This was where father and son stroll along to the pond with their fishing poles in hand accompanied by that incessant whistling.

From the moment the moving van pulled away from our rented house, I knew my fate was sealed; fishing was in my future.

For a while, I evaded the inevitable. New schools offered a challenge; new friendships formed that occupied my boy's time. As with his mother and father, Tommy had too much on his mind to remember his once burning desire to fish. Then, at 12 years old and approaching the end of sixth grade, my years of stalling could no longer be sustained.

"Hey, I'm taking my boys to a fishing rodeo on Saturday," a now relatively newfound friend said in earshot of my son. "You and Tommy want to come along?"

You bastard! You son of a bitch! Did he have any idea how long I had been maneuvering around the whole fishing issue? Sure this guy had become one of my best friends. And sure, his boy is one of my son's best friends. Nevertheless, he should have quietly pulled me aside and ran it by me first. He should have made sure I was okay with the whole deal, the very idea in and of itself. I know he was just trying to be friendly and inclusive. Normally, I'd be appreciative of such a—

Fish rodeo? What the hell is a fish rodeo?

Apparently, the local parks-n-rec has an annual "youth fishing rodeo," whereby hundreds of kids cram shoulder to shoulder around the banks of a pond to compete for prizes such as "first fish caught," "longest fish by length," "heaviest

fish," "most creative fishing hat," and other pathways to childhood memories of fishing glory.

"Sure," I heard myself saying in disbelief as Tommy shot me a blatant we-WILL-be-doing-this look. "We'd love to go."

Iacta alea est; the die is cast...and so it was. This time, there would be no skirting around Fate's plan. I had cheated the hook for the last time.

There will be fishing.

Fishing poles, weights, hooks, WORMS for God's sake. What have I done?

This was out in some godforsaken field where a wealthy rancher and dairy farmer once a year opened up the pond he uses to water his cows. Kids could come and competitively fish — that's right, competitively fish! — for fun and annual bragging rights. It was definitely crafted to be one of those classic father-n-son bonding-moment events. So because Mister Rich-n-Generous Cow Guy likes to "give something back to the community," now I had to endure the heat, bugs and bait in order to look as if a "normal" dad to my kid.

Perfect.

Just fucking perfect.

I remember in this now-only-a-dream pre-EVENT OMEGA world, what an LA friend of mine — a renowned gastroenterologist who became famous in the field of endoscopic procedures with his ever-so-popular "quality colonoscopy in 30 minutes or less,

or your money back” guarantee — told me.

You know, I can still picture those television commercials of his; professionally produced they were not.

Anyway, he said to me while we sipped martinis in his backyard horizon-pool overlooking the Pacific Ocean, “Fuck the eyes; the asshole is the window to the soul.”

Admittedly, abundant success at his chosen profession may have rendered his philosophic insight a tad vocationally myopic. If one accepts his statement as fact, then I must have a handcrafted, stained-glass, floor-to-ceiling, cathedral-sized picture window adorning my soul.

Look, my point is that I felt like an asshole out there in the middle of this field trying to pretend like I had any sort of fucking clue as to how to fish. Of course, it didn’t help things that I wasn’t allowed to plop my prodigious derriere down at the first sight of the fishing hole. Oh no. That would have been too simple.

No, we had to take our traveling circus of chairs and poles and bait boxes and coolers and snacks and other bizarre assortments of gear-n-clothes to the farthest reaches of the place; the ends of the Earth in relation to the angling venue.

Why?

Because that’s where my friend was sure — absolutely sure — the best fish were. That’s where they were catching ‘em last year. So by God, that’s where my fat ass was

going to have to trek to this year. Moses and the Jews wandered the desert for less time and in less heat than our little crew did to get to the nether regions of this cow pasture and its muddy-banked pond.

As our beloved parked vehicle and its sole source of air conditioning grew smaller and smaller in our sight as we made way to that “perfect spot,” I couldn’t help but notice the strange little dance my son did as we trudged along the cow path.

It seems that while we all did our best to avoid the “cow patties” peppered along the trail, my kid — my LA city-kid — thought it was fun to actually try to step in the steaming piles of those-ain’t-mud pies.

Poor little bastard; your daddy never told you the ways of the natural world.

Well, of course, after hours and hours going elbow-to-elbow with a bunch of kids with everything from professional poles to the “I’m a Big Girl’s Dream Fishing Pole,” we wound up with bupkis to show for it.

My friend and his boys? They were winning awards for the biggest fish caught and more.

Tommy and I? We wound up catching sunburn, bug bites and a whole lot of disappointment.

“You know what?” I said to my son, conjuring up and briefly enjoying what was my only true laugh during the absolutely ignoble affair. “I thought the funniest part of the day was when you didn’t realize you weren’t supposed to actually try to step in all of those cow pat-

ties.”

I couldn’t help but chuckle at my boy’s feces-covered footwear.

“Me, too, Dad,” Tommy said as we shuffled back to the car in the scorching heat, “especially since I’m wearing your sneakers.”

Optimism is the most sincere form of blasphemy. ❖

“Freezer Burn”

Some state our world will end in great white balls of pointless fire.
Still others, idiots mostly, claim that it will merely fizzle.
And if the curtain falls tonight, 'twas I, in righteous ire,
that gobbled up all the Breyers, with a Hershey's syrup drizzle.

In fact, I pushed great gobs of happiness into my gaping maw
not thinking a New York minute on my lactose-intolerant gut,
for this evening's news lent me to believe they play “win, lose or draw,”
and no one cares a whit about emanations from my butt.



I imagined that you wouldn't mind, being already fast asleep,
while I stealthily loaded the dishwasher, and started
on up to bed, sans my usual thud-and-peep,
when, teeth brushed and fresh pajama'd, under the covers...I farted.

In truth, I launched a crepitation so obtrusive that it woke
you, and you looked at me with a drowsy smile and sniffed and so did I,
and oh my god – I kid you not – this was no simple methane joke.
I most heinously blamed the dog with a rolling of my eye.

I'm sorry about that my darling, no harm intended; this time tomorrow
you and I and the pooch will be splats of charcoal, our lives but an ether-dream.
One must be around to feel the nostalgic pang of regret, or sorrow,
so never mind I licked the last sweet spoon of Rocky Road ice cream.

They say that blame is for fools and small children, ah, well . . .
So if by happenstance the madmen's work remains undone,
I paved with good intentions my own slippery road to hell
with a coupon I left on the counter, two-fer the price of one.

Two by John Grey

“Pandemic Days”

For a year now,
the whole city has gone about
masked and nervy,
worried for themselves,
fearful of other people.

A man in the park
is bewildered.
He doesn't understand
why the oak
isn't covered up,
why squirrels aren't wearing
cloth over their faces.

He spies a young couple
embracing and kissing.
He can't imagine
how painful that must be.

"July 4th"

Another July 4th,
another sky full of exploding colors.

Noise enough to disturb
the puppies inside the disturbed dog.

One child's face sparkles with tears.
Another laughs so hard, his jaw aches.

Independence day
so let's fire off another bottle rocket.

Independence day
and an abandoned tenement goes up in flames.

Independence day
and the grill's a fiery pit of gray smoke.

Independence day
and the backyard puffs and crackles with gawking eyes.

Flies attack the sausages.
Half-eaten burgers expose their ketchup wounds.

A cheek is burnt, an ear is perforated
and the British lower their flag for one more year.

“Tracking Down Clues”

By John Grey

Your poetry has me scratching my head
and beyond.

Everything's so random.

Like the words were spilled not written.

You must imagine yourself

a Jackson Pollock of the literary world,

maybe make sense

but, most likely, not.

And yet, here I am,

thumbing through your latest chapbook.

The lines may be meaningless

but they're your lines,

the rhythms, your rhythms,

the sounds, your sounds.

And what else do I have to go on?

Your conversation barely scrapes

your surface.

Your body language

was last spoken by the dead.

So all the clues must be here:

the wishing pole,

the underground airplane,

the sideways daydream,

the pigeon parasol.

What can I say?

I'm not in love with a masturbating toadstool.

But I've a feeling I may have to be.

Contributors

R.F. Gonzalez was born in Nicaragua. After living in Europe and Central America, he moved to the United States where he works as a writing instructor, investor, and writer. He has written several short stories and two books, an anti-love story and an anthropology text. His work can be viewed at <https://www.rfgonzalez.com/>.

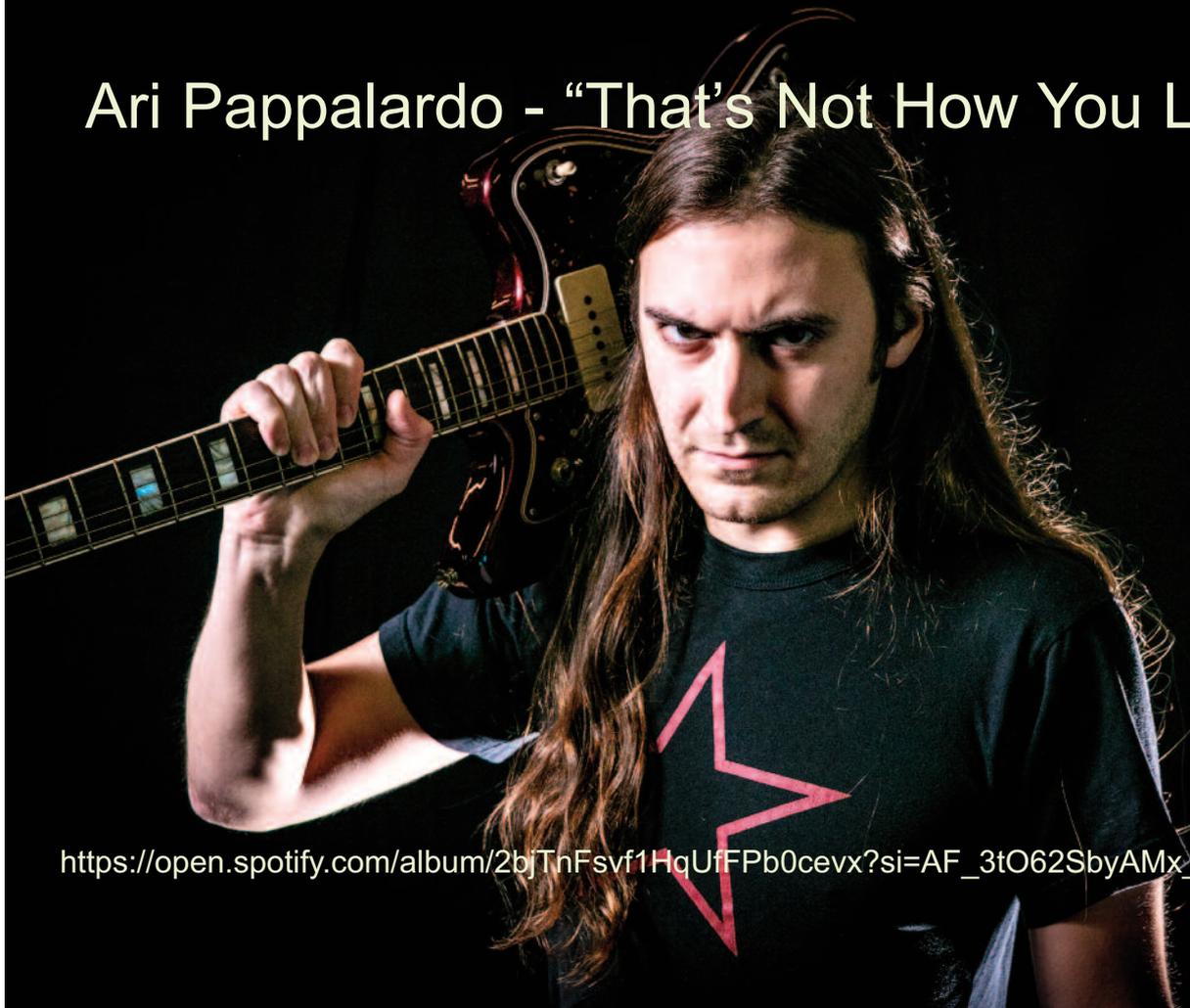
Somewhere between Sci-Fi/Fantasy and outright Bizarro, Slipstream Absurdist-Humor author **Joe Buonfiglio** lurks in the shadows waiting to strike. He's that anomalous laughter coming from the back of your uncle's funeral wake. Joe's worldview melds into his writing; he embraces the random chaos of the universe that manifests in a type of humor that lampoons anyone or anything even attempting to create some semblance of order from it all. If there is any Intelligence behind the Design, Joe is fairly certain It's gone completely mad.

An award-winning journalist and commentary writer, Buonfiglio's literary style has been described as "ribald academia that emerges from a dark place" and "locker-room intelligentsia laced with the tears of polite society." You'll find you are laughing at the literary tapestry he weaves, and yet, at the same time, ashamed of yourself for having done so. To experience more of Joe Buonfiglio's strange approach to both humor and literature (not to mention life), as well as encounter his "unblog" Potpourri of the Damned, go to his website at JoeBuonfiglio.com.

Richard Van Ingram illustrated "The Post-Apocalyptic Dining Guide." He is currently illustrating the novel "Dust of the Earth." He resides in San Antonio, TX.

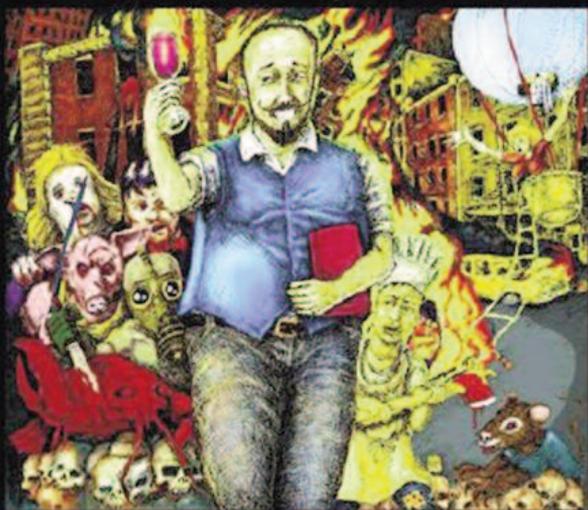
John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *New World Writing*, *Dalhousie Review* and *Blood And Thunder*. Other work is upcoming in *Hollins Critic*, *Redactions* and *California Quarterly*.

Ari Pappalardo - "That's Not How You Love"



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The POST-APOCALYPTIC DINING GUIDE



Joe Buonfiglio

Something
ABSURDLY WONDERFUL
and
WONDERFULLY ABSURD
this way comes!

THE POST-APOCALYPTIC DINING GUIDE

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American Haute Cuisine and the
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