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G. M. SomersEditor-in-Chief
Martin K. Smith..Publisher-at-Large, Treasurer
Marilyn Fontenot.....Director of Development
Laine Cunningham.....Publishing Consultant
Brace Boone III.....Marketing Advisor
Richard Hess.....Programs Director
T.J. Garrett.....Staff Photographer

Subscriptions Contact:
Martin K. Smith
M_K_Smith@yahoo.com
919.286.7760

Advertisers Contact:
Martin K. Smith
M_K_Smith@yahoo.com
919.286.7760

Submissions and Editorial Business to:
Jenny Haniver
mermaid@blotterrag.com

Garrison Somers, Editor-in-Chief
chief@blotterrag.com

919.869.7110 (business hours only! you may
call for information about snail-mail submis-
sions)

Marketing & Public Relations Contact:
Marilyn Fontenot
marilyng_fontenot@gmail.com

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“Nothing To Say”

I may have already mentioned this: I play a game, online, on my phone, with many other players worldwide, and the starting object is one thing (to clobber zombies) and then over time the game becomes another thing (to make alliances and fight other players). And for what it’s worth to any armchair analysts, I choose not to be in an alliance. I prefer just to collect resources and fight the program-created zombies. I do get attacked from time to time, but I don’t keep my treasure out there to be the spoils of war. I use what I gather and then go get more. I suspect that there is a dissatisfaction in an “opponent” checking out my camp and seeing little of value there. Perhaps because of this there are players who think twice before making the effort to attack me. Perhaps not. We are an aggressive species, whether we like to admit it or not.

And so the game goes. A lot like life. Occasionally I move...forward, one slow ladder-rung level at a time, and that’s something. The levels have meaning in the bigger plot of the game, but not much to me. But it helps me play my own game. Occasionally, I’m involved in a battle I didn’t instigate in any way other than just being in the app, on the board, so to speak, with my camp and level displayed for others to investigate. I treat a battle like the weather – a hurricane or tsunami - cleaning up after with the resignation that this, too, is part of life.

Still, I may have learned something in recent days that intrigues me. I think there is another game going on, within the game, something altogether unexpected and interesting to me. A function provided by the game developers permits players to chat with one another during the zombie-hunt. Ostensibly, it is a tool that provides people who don’t really know each other (I assume) a way to ask for assistance, to lend each other resources, or rally troops for a major undead-clobbering campaign, or to deal with one of the special events that the game introduces once or twice a month – holiday-themed rewards or alliance-vs-alliance strength tests, intended to add to the game experience – the aggressive part. Leaders of alliances can speak, via text, to their members and subjects, and each other, to coordinate their movements.

But beneath all of the game stuff, this old-school chatroom is a social media platform, for communication among players, and not

just during the “specials,” but all of the time. Players log on to see what others are doing, while they collect resources and kill zombies and other enemies. They ask personal questions, get answers, talk to and tease each other about how they play the game. And they learn about one another, the conversations they have are revelatory, and the friendships seem to be as important as playing the game itself. Players sign on and call out for friends to see if they’re out there. They talk about what they’ve been doing that day, and what they might do later – in this “public” place. They josh, they console, they flirt. It is a kind of like-minded community.

None of this should be surprising, to you or to me. Or my friend John, who often says to me that I need to try to get to my points with greater celerity. Which I agree. But not at this particular moment.

What is most interesting to me is that there is a sort of briefhand they use – like something I learned about in middle-school for taking notes during class. The elimination of certain rules of language and the addition of others, and possibly unique to this game and its long-term players. Replacement of words with emojis – quite common in our electronic social interaction and the construction of other pictures from keyboard characters – dashes, emdashes, dots, dashes and slashes, into pictures that portray an interpretable message. I suspect that the pidgin that they have created is tops-down – the most senior players who have known each other as allies and opponents the longest, make the rules for what typing in all caps represents, or what one pair of emoji googly-eyes means versus two or even three. Does it mean “look” or “look!” or “LOOK!” and if so, what is the message. With words, glyphs and pictograms, repetition, and a kind of learned nuance of response timing and non-response, a shared jargon-code has been invented or selectively pulled from other social environments by the players and agreed to as *creole* – a new mother-tongue for this game in which I am a foreigner. I can kibbitz this public “party line” and find doing so easily more fascinating than the game itself.

What is it am I seeing? A possible mutation to our language, in which the lush vocabulary of English is altered, for whatever reason – expedience, privacy, playfulness – into something else. Will there be clarity? Will there be a musical quality to it, a poetry that arises from some sort of phoenix ash of grammar and structure

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in the Great State of Georgia!



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CAUTION

don't want to play I just

“A Fable of Forfeiture”

By Emily C

Like persistent Spring sprouts,
A petite vulnerable bundle awakens to life’s wonders,
Under maternal protection and enduring love,
Naively fearless, wide-eyed, obedient, and happy.
It was as if the universe had oriented itself
solely for Its existence.
Nothing was undelightful! Everything was joyous!
Even dreams of flight without wings would seize its imagination...

Summers were teeming with aquatic adventures
Water as elemental as air
Diving and frolicking in pools in play
Freedom was unlikened to any other season
Until the discovery of its own musical voice—
Strong and vivacious of youth, a natural wren—
A harmonious tone that seized all others.
To lace melodies with emotive song by its own design
was as transforming as gills to a mammal in water; This was flying!
Gift of unique genes—no one else’s was similar,
so not a valued trait in the family.
While swimming and juvenile experimentations set aside
except those for singing explorations, its unbounded
Happiness again ignited
yet under-supported by familial ideals.

We know the leaf turns and a chill welcomes Autumn,
so does the clock chime in new hours and
distractions of adolescent graduation,
of cultural and social conformities,
leaving of the nest and avoiding famine,
pursuing fortune and pleasing parental hopes;
Too many distant Summers long forgotten,
overwhelmed by the weight of adult realities—
occupied in assumed drudgeries,
progressing within redundant boundaries
of the self-built cage of her own making,
treading in confinement in infinity of time

although forging bonds of friendships and seizing love,
suffering sanity and mediocrity,
presuming peace of mind,
unbeknownst of the maturing of individual efflorescence
and the darkening of foliage and balding of branches.

The thud of the last ripened frond
echoes of emptiness and portending expiration;
withered verdancy laying bare
—demarcating bars
aged and hardened by weathering.
Finally aware of the changed landscape,
the impending frost and Winter beckoning around the corner,
her attention unescaping
of former liberation
of prior prime;
Consciousness long unattended
suddenly grasping
the divinity of energy, spirit, and ebullience
visibly disintegrating and dulled by the years;
the kinetic luminance of marvel, stuporous bliss,
uncluttered charm concluded.
Illuminating still, the rose-colored reversion to
velvet chorus and song, but met with surprise—
stricken screeching—uneven sounds;
even the tone unrecognizably altered.
Like solidified glass and irreversible amber,
the chords have calcified
permanently congealed in place;
unbending like the voracious capacity of vernal lungs—
taken for granted over implicit eternity;
regretfully seized in neglect;
Gravely mistaken.
A disturbing loss.
Waste from futility.

“The Shakespearean sonnet
about my dog”

by Paweł Markiewicz

You, hound, are a starry night over fog,
fallen in love with the Epiphany.
The moon may be mine! Told the moony dog.
With you tender garden – is so dreamy.

Bewitchment of stars, your ability.
Your hunting is dearer observation.
A moonlit night is your eternity.
May the soft ghost be in adoration!

Roses awoken in glory – starlet.
You can taste, listen and feel them galore.
Enchant the nectar like druidic glade!
It was drunk from Ovidian amphorae.

Be, you dog, a heart-shaped meek poet!
Broken wings of loneliness are dead.

“Blackcurrant And Toadstools”

It's all so nice in a tube. As if it kicked you to slice a dice, but when you look throughout these bars... Oh, how smooth and nice they are, aren't they? Warm and brown, behave as if they were alive. But what, my neighbour, is behind.

two by Jack Frost

“Kindly as Kierkegaard”

Darryl slid three quarters from his darkest pocket into the vending machine and weighed his new options. He didn't know what to take, it was kind of sad. Maybe dried shrooms. Maybe the carrot cake. Is it important or, at least, the main concept? Now he remembers, he is so fat. He should wear a hat for not losing brain. All the time, trying to lye up some Mary, that would be choosing food for him. What now, time flies, oh, he can't say how. And for the first time he realised, he realised, he was totally alone.

two by Patrick Meeds

“This is the Small Talk of Priests”

I used to play chess with my father
on a special set he had
where all of the pieces were pawns
and all the squares on the board
were blue. He said he inherited it
from his father and his father inherited it
from his father and well, you get the idea.
Robert had a Richard had a Robert had a Richard.
It was either play with him or listen
as he recited all the names of the dead.
He also always talked about standing in a circle
made of salt or brick dust
or some such nonsense to ward off evil.
To be honest it all sounded like the small
talk of priests if you ask me.
What are you gonna do?
Some birds fly at night and it's obvious
trees grow while we're not looking.
I was baptized and my head is still damp.
I was confirmed so my hand is stamped.
I guess there's nothing left to be scared of.

“This Isn’t Really How I Died”

If anyone calls for me,
just tell them I died
in a blimp accident.
Don’t make a big deal about it
or anything. If they ask just say
it was a slow deflation
not a tremendous explosion.
I’m not being ridiculous,
you’re being ridiculous.
I get it, I like the idea of a safe room too,
I’m just not sure how practical one is.
What if you lock yourself in there with a ghost?
Then the lights go out
and when you reach for a flashlight
you feel someone else’s warm hand
reaching for it too.
Somewhere kids are playing basketball
in the street. Moms are folding laundry
and checking homework. Dads are driving
carpool and humming along with the radio.
Dogs are scratching at the door
to be let out/in. Cats are sleeping
in a patch of sunlight beneath a window.
Cars are getting their oil changed.
Planes are taxiing down the runway.
Trains are pulling into the station.
Buses are making that hissing air brake noise
they make when they stop at the curb
to let people out. Look, what I’m trying to say
is anything is possible and there you are
stuck in that safe room in the dark
with a ghost.

“Fuck you, Wyoming. Yeah, I said it...”

Home, home on the range
where deer and antelope
exchange the strange.
They are, from this distance,
quite a mélange,
where one ruminant's beam
nicely fits another's flange.
And seldom is heard
from the menage-a-herd,
and the sun is a blush of orange.

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.

Dream 1:

We were President Bill Clinton's guests. I kept away at first, not wanting to talk to him because of the presence of a promiscuous woman. We were sitting at the dinner table, and I nudged my Dad to refrain from arguing with my younger brother. I expressed a view that drew Clinton's attention. He then sat next to me and spoke against some policy in Arabic. I expressed my desire to go for a walk. Clinton told me it would be very difficult for guests to wander about unprotected. He mentioned something about heavy security. Knowing of my wish to go sightseeing, he arranged for an excursion in a boat. It was very dark.

We were sitting at the edge of a brook and water was crystal-clear, very still, very tranquil. He had a white, beautiful sack in his hand, full of bread. We began to feed birds. His arm encircled my neck, his hand gently resting on my shoulder. I felt inner peace. There was nothing contrived about the position of the hand. Like that of a life-long and intimate friend, it naturally rested on my shoulder. A fawn waded closer and began to eat from my hands. After a while, a multitude of locust-like creatures, very ancient-looking, aggressively began to attack me. Clinton grabbed each as it clung to my body and then crushed it. He was relentlessly defending me all the time.

I was on the scales, a very sophisticated type that is apparently attached to another device. Clinton wanted me to weigh myself. He could not come out with any results and said that my weight and height were too unique to be measured!

Dream 2:

Mrs. --- persistently sought me. At first, I ran away from her. For some inexplicable reason, I eventually consented to give her my teeth, which she desperately wanted. She got most of those in the upper jaw, except for the front ones. She hoarded them like gold. She wanted the remainder of my teeth. She offered \$10 for each. I told her I wanted \$50 for each small one and \$200 for each big one. I took my teeth, fled from her, and sought someone to put them back for me.

Susie G. - Syria

“Cameraman”

by Michael McCarthy

Outside the window,
lies a world where,
I can see only

trees dancing with wind,
snow fluttering about the branches,
marking the wind currents
that push the pond
farther onto the shore.

The snowfall rests beneath the wind,
blankets the grass.

The flakes lay with each other.

It's so easy to lose yourself here,
forget who you are and become

a camera.

Another person could stand beside me,
staring out the same window,
at the same wind, trees, pond, and snow,
for we could forget ourselves and
each other.

But a newcomer would find it odd
because he sees not the beauty
but the onlooker, motionless, inert, blank.
They would think
how odd it is
to find a person who lives
to forget himself.

The idea makes me uneasy.
I could spend all day staring,
but the sound of approaching footsteps
scares me as footsteps do

a rabbit.

So I leave
to compose these lines.

**“In the end, the job you take
Is equal to the job you fake”**

I dreamt I worked in retail sales
and all the managers were on a break,
with confused customers, wall-to-wall.
Someone had mislabeled each of the aisles.
So I was in tech-support, after all,
Just like when I am awake.

Contributors

Emily C. pens passionately under various pen names while scheming on adventures abroad. Her poems, collectively titled ‘The Infrangible and Frangible’, have been published in The Dillydoun Review in 2020. Her spunky mind is trapped by strange ideas rescued only by iced coffees and friendly debates. Find her on Twitter @ElanWriter.

Paweł Markiewicz was born 1983 in Siemiatycze in Poland. He is poet who lives in Bielsk Podlaski and writes tender poems, haiku as well as long poems. Paweł has published his poetries in many magazines. He writes in English and German.

Jack Frost is nothing and everything in the universe. Not in yours, of course. He lives in Prague, but you can send him regards on Twitter (@hehasanaccount), where he posts some catchy pieces, circa once per year.

Patrick Meeds lives in Syracuse, NY and studies writing at the Syracuse YMCA’s Downtown Writer’s Center. He has been previously published in Stone Canoe literary journal, the New Ohio Review, Tupelo Quarterly, the Atticus Review, Whiskey Island, Guernica, East by Northeast, Door Is A Jar, Jokes Review, and is forthcoming in Muddy River Poetry Review, and Doubly Mad

Michael McCarthy is a writer from New England. He is an undergraduate at Haverford College, dodging the pandemic by taking a gap year. His work has appeared previously in Cleaver and Prairie Schooner.

Meet **Jonathan White**. Jonathan is an incredible photographer from New York. His project, “The Colors of the Urban Landscape”, shows the vibrant colors in what is perceived to be a dreary landscape. His colorful and gorgeous work truly speaks for itself. Over the last 31 years, he had several art shows in Long Island, Rochester, and Manhattan. To learn more and see more of Jonathan’s work go to his page on www.feinartistry.com. Jonathan White can also be found on FaceBook or Instagram at Jonathan White: Photographer/Digital Artist/Creative Professional, jon@jwgalleries, and on Twitter. Email jon@jwgalleries to purchase any of his work.

continued from page 3

that I understand? Or is this already there, and I am not seeing, or able to interpret it because I'm not worthy to be its Champollion or Turing?

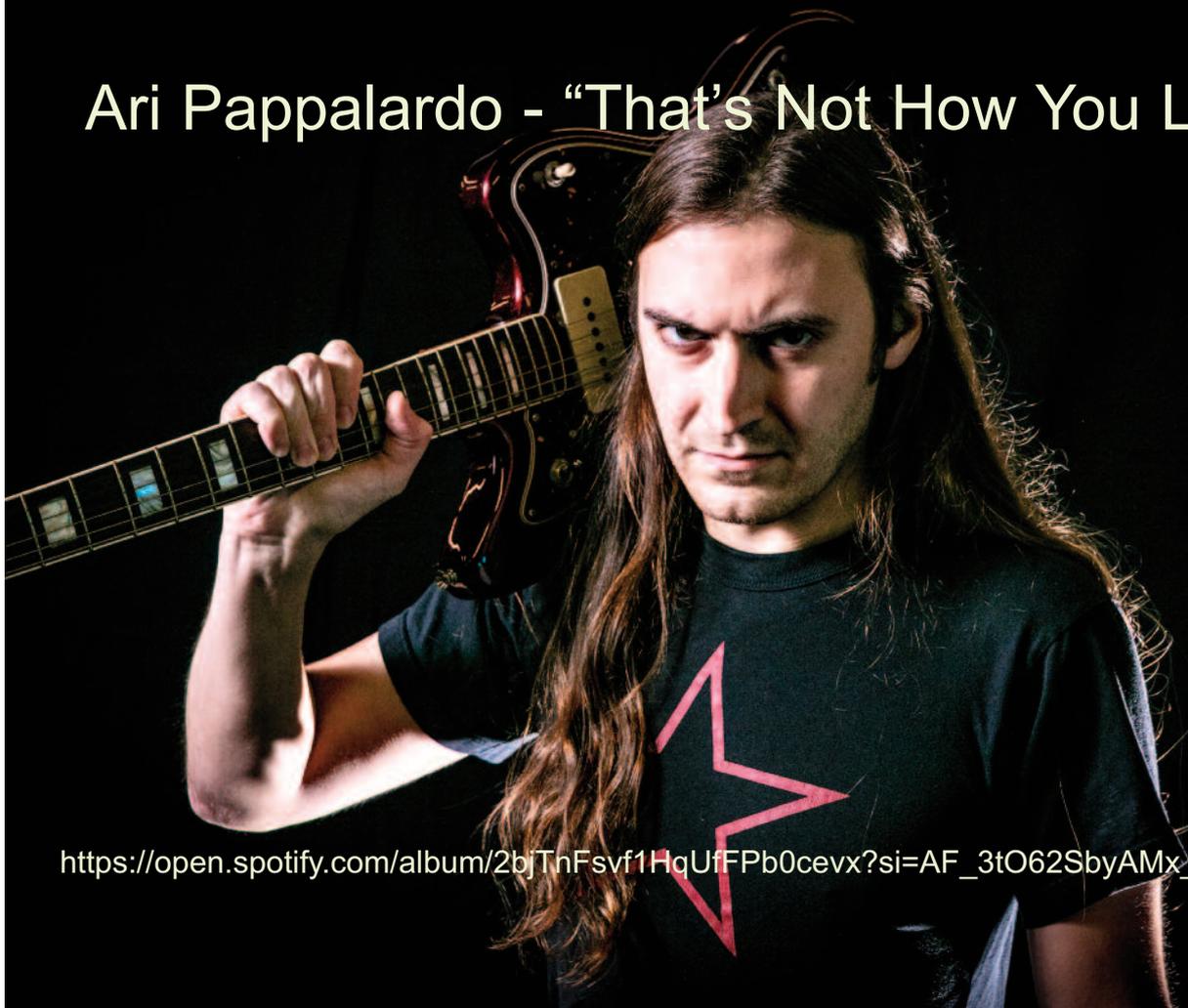
When we speak to one another in person there is a linguistic understanding between us, an agreed to set of guidelines. We use the same language, for example, or some common tongue. When we switch to the telephone, those precise guidelines cannot and therefore do not apply. On the telephone, we cannot use our faces - our body-language - to temper our words into comprehension by the person we are speaking with. Some of this possibly tele-miscommunication (a hundred years of it) has been partially rectified by tools – Skype, Facetime and Zoom – but not completely. Still, there is still breakage in the line-speeds and screen-sizes that frustrate, disappoint, subtly change the mood of the conversation.

These tools of the 21st century assume that people want to be understood by others, by everyone. We feel a need to have as much social context in our business as we can, particularly in times of isolation such as that which we currently experience. But what if this were not the case? What if the senior players of my game – belay that, *their* game – don't necessarily care that I understand them. I am still, to them, a novice, a newb who has not met the coming-of-age requirements of their social conventions. I am an outsider. They, on the other hand, are a tribe of friends and acquaintances, with rituals and social hierarchies to which I am intentionally not privy. They don't ask me to leave, don't exclude me, but they don't welcome me, either.

And, as a final note, players are also required to occasionally “war” with one another, tribe versus tribe, and then band together as a clan of tribes to war against other clans. These ritualized wars have a prescribed length, at which the clans and tribes return to a state of peace. Oddly enough, the players feel no enmity towards each other before or after these ritual-wars. War is just the passing of treasure from one to another, and the earning of experience-treasure from the game-developers – the Gods? The players open their chatrooms to the greater group, beyond their tribes and clans and josh and console and flirt some more, in their word-and-picture brief-hand. It's all part of the game, I've been told on more than one occasion. And that, too, is interesting to me. Maybe there's something more here than meets the eye.

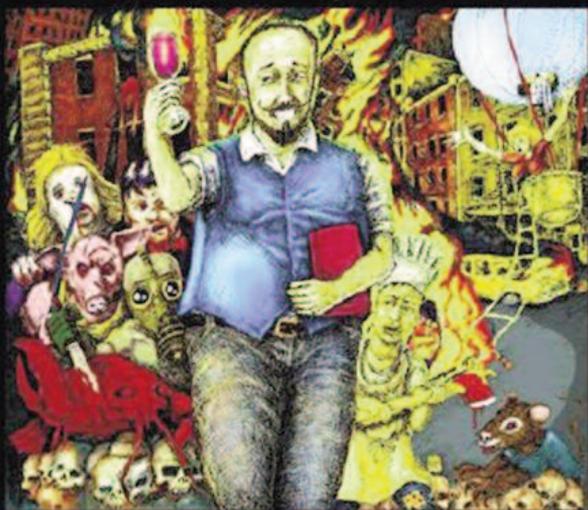
Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

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



https://open.spotify.com/album/2bjTnFsvf1HqUfFPb0cevx?si=AF_3tO62SbyAMx_IMUBVHw

The POST-APOCALYPTIC DINING GUIDE



Joe Buonfiglio

Something
ABSURDLY WONDERFUL
and
WONDERFULLY ABSURD
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