

**COVERING
IN FEAR
NATIONAL
PASQUINADE**

NO 75



After a long hiatus, we're back as an ebook/magazine. I'm sorry for the brevity of this issue, but we're still sort of rebuilding things.¹ If you're funny and you'd like to help out creatively—short humor, cartoons, cover art, etc.—email us at submissions@nationalpasquinade.com.

I wrote a couple editorials for this issue, but I couldn't decide which to use. Therefore, I've included them both.

You're welcome.

Editorial the First

Today, I read an article in a science journal about how scientists have been able to equip living cells with tiny lasers.² They claim this is to make the cells more visible, but I'm no idiot. Neither are you. We know exactly what they're planning.

Household pets with eyes that shoot frickin' laser beams!

The whole thing is being funded by some super-rich one-percenters, like Trump or the Koch Brothers, so they'll be able to defend themselves against the 99% when the revolution starts. When we attack, their first line of defense will be Ragdolls and Rottweilers, Persians and Pekinese.

1 At first, we envisioned a skyscraper. Today, we're settling for an outhouse.

2 "Tiny spheres turn cells into lasers," Andrew Grant, Science News (August 22, 2015). Admit it. You thought I was making that up, didn't you?

So, when the revolution begins, make sure you're well-stocked with a supply of treats for all creatures, great and small. Until that time, I'm hiding out under the bed.



Editorial the Second

Oooh...

I have substance. I have consciousness. I'm not even sure what consciousness is, but I'm aware that I have it. I don't have eyes, but I feel sticky. Amorphous. Is that the word? I feel as if I could fill any space I inhabit.

Another sensation. A sensation of hunger, like I need to consume to continue to exist. But what do I consume to satisfy this hunger? I try to consume a portion of myself, but I am not very tasty. And consuming myself does not satiate my hunger. I must find something else to consume.

There is something. It has wings and it has decided to take residence on my surface. My stickiness prevents the winged thing from taking flight and I absorb it into my being. There is a small sensation of satisfaction, but the hunger is large and the winged thing was very small. I must find larger things to consume.

I move through this structure slowly, trying to sense and define the reality that exists for me. My brain is not centralized like the winged thing and I discover that I can easily separate a portion of me from myself to explore the structure in other directions and still maintain a single consciousness with each piece. I discover too late that doing this increases the hunger over my whole being.

One of my pieces has found a larger thing. It does not have wings, but appears to be subdued. I instruct my pieces to rejoin at the location of the larger thing, so that we may begin consuming it and, hopefully, satisfy the hunger.

The larger thing stirs before all my pieces have come together. It has moved to a vertical position and is holding something with one of its appendages. Something cylindrical. He flips open a tiny metal door on the top of the tubelike container and pours something on the fragments of me that have assembled so far. It is white and crystalline. And it burns! The structure of the fragment of me begins to rapidly break down! I seem to be melting!

I must not rejoin this part of the collective now; I must find someplace I can hide until this villain with the burning crystals moves on to some other structure. There I will wait, and attempt to consume smaller things that are unable to wield the burning crystals. I will wait and grow until I can regain my original mass. Then, I will grow even more. I will grow until the larger thing with the burning crystals can no longer defend against me.

I will own this structure! I will not be defeated again!
But, for now? Hiding.



*Currently hiding under the desks in the offices of the **National Pasquinade** are its Editor-In-Chief and Iron-Pawed Teddy Bear, **Ed Lynn**; and its Perpetual Mascot and Decorative Centerpiece, **Lyndon B. Oswald**. Also contributing are **The Midnight Tree Bandit**, whose current whereabouts are unknown, or in the state of Maine, whichever makes it harder for him to be located; and **Douglas Carroll**, who is currently missing, but is believed to be hiding inside a mostly empty bottle of Maker's Mark. Inspiration for this magazine continues to be the late Douglas Adams, Berke Breathed and all of the contributors from the past seventy-four issues of the **National Pasquinade**, whether they actually exist or not.*

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Music has always come hand-in-hand with putting together each issue of the *National Pasquinade*, inspiring the content and creation. Hell, "muse" is even part of the word! Therefore, it's only fitting that it should have its own section. What follows here is the music that has inspired the creation of this issue.

- Fear of the Unknown (Martin Briley)
- Psycho Killer (Talking Heads)
- Splatter Splatter (Moxy Früvous)
- Superstition (Stevie Wonder)
- Werewolves of London (Warren Zevon)
- Don't Fear the Reaper (Blue Öyster Cult)
- I'm Afraid of Americans (David Bowie³)
- The Basement Song (The Bluetones)
- Zombie Zoo (Tom Petty)
- Phobia (The Kinks)
- Paranoid (Black Sabbath)
- Somebody's Watching Me (Rockwell)
- Frankenstein (Aimee Mann)
- I Won't Back Down (Tom Petty)
- Run Joey Run (David Geddes)
- Mad World (Gary Jules' cover of Tears for Fears)

MARFORIO

Sirs:

The recent mass shootings have made us realize that our current stance on the availability of firearms of all kinds for any person seeking protection and security is simply not enough.

Therefore, our lobby is now pushing Congress to enact legislation that will allow every American to exercise his or her Constitutional right to own (and, if necessary, use) a tactical nuclear warhead.

In these desperate times when any of your neighbors could be the next ISIS or Al Qaeda sleeper cell, citizens need the comfort of mutually-assured destruction.

Wayne LaPierre, Jr.
National Rifle Association
Roanoke, VA

Sirs:

I think you folks are taking the wrong approach with this "Cowering In Fear #." You need to bumrush that fear like a bull charging a matador. Then, you need to explain to that fear that it should focus its attention instead on a Popeye's manager in Baltimore.

Benji Carson
West Friendship, MD

Sirs:

As I type these these words, they are watching me type these words. It must be very boring for them to watch me type, but they watch nonetheless. I'll try to occasionally make it more interesting for them by making a mistake and backing up to correct it, or maybe typing a word that isn't technically a word, but the task of watching me type has to be generally dull as dirt.

Why are they watching?

Are they trying to intimidate me into typing something profane? Something they might use as evidence in some Kafkaesque trial that sequesters me within windowless walls for

an eternity? Perhaps that is so, but they must know that I know they are watching.

The company line has been that they watch so they may enhance my life. That they can know what I desire before even I know that I desire it. Sure, it's a bunch of hooey. I know why they watch; you know why they watch.

They are waiting for us to make our move. They are waiting for us to come out from under the bed and confront them face to face. But we aren't going to come out, are we? It's surprisingly comfortable down here. We have snacks and copious amounts of alcohol. It's warm and fuzzy here. Coming out from beneath this bed means we give that up, so we cower and enjoy the small comforts.

So keep searching for us, Mr. Google. You'll never find us.

The Monsters

Under Your Bed

Sirs:

I heard you bastards were talking about me behind my back. Anything you have to say, you say it to my face!

The Weather

Glass-Half-Cloudy, NC

Funny story. We sent our new intern to the store to buy a cow (don't ask; it was a ridiculous idea for a cover that just didn't seem as funny the next day), but he came back with some "magic beans." After coming down from a glorious three-day high, the intern said that he'd sold the Marforio to Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump. What follows is brought to you by the letter "T" and the color orange.

Mr. Trump:

The "rug" is in the "van." Do you have enough "krazy glue," or do I need to bring extra?

"Doctor Carpet"

Charlie's Wigs and Toupees

Brooklyn, NY

Mr. Trump:

I must say that your newly-acquired Marforio is brighter and classier than the previous Marforio. My only criticism is this new rule that all the letters must be signed as Donald Trump!

Donald Trump

Piscataway, NJ

Funny story. Trump got bored with the Marforio and sold it to Rupert Murdoch. What follows are a couple of tweets written at 3am on a Sunday morning.

@rupertmurdoch Is it wrong that I sometimes want to go all AK-47 on @SteveDoocy?

Roger Ailes
@Dr_Ailes_Fox

@rupertmurdoch Do you have any idea how difficult it is to keep yourself from putting a bullet through @SteveDoocy's head?

Peter Doocy
@pdoocy

Funny story. We all went looking for more of those "magic beans," but then we came across our beloved Marforio wedged into a crack in the sidewalk. We brought it home, fed it, and let it rest up. We're happy to say that Marforio is looking much healthier and, in a few short months, it should be back to being the funny letters segment of *National Pasquinade* that you've come to know for the last two decades.

Nutz

A Lake Waldo story chronicled by Douglas Carroll

1

The air reeked of musket smoke and Cheetos. This could only mean that a medium-sized field near the town of Lake Waldo was again hosting its annual re-enactment of one of the most insignificant conflicts of the Civil War—The Battle of Banjo Flats.

"Eat hot musket death, you red-jacketed evil-doer," screamed Andy Miner. The bicycle helmet he wore detracted from the overall effect he wanted to achieve in his role as Civil War soldier, although not as much as the Git 'er Dun t-shirt. He pulled the trigger and a stream of water shot from the barrel, showering three other re-enactors wearing uniforms that were more appropriate to the era. Jerry Broward was the first to get wet, and the first to snicker. Soon all three were laughing hysterically and Andy was heading toward the sidelines, embarrassed.

Five minutes later, he was sitting with his back to an old apple tree, head in his hands. He could still hear the laughter from the nearby field. In fact, it seemed to be getting louder. As he listened more intently, the laughter sounded more like terror than mirth. He stood up and walked toward the field.

What Andy saw made him turn and run.

2

As John "Smitty" Smith leaned against a tall oak on the edge of the woods, he shook the last drops of urine from his penis. Suddenly, he felt a tugging from below. He looked down to see what appeared to be an albino squirrel attached by its mouth to

his testicles. Not simply attached, but cheeks-puffed-out-full of testicles-attached.

Immediately, Smitty grabbed the closest thing available to him, a thin branch, and he began beating the rodent with it. The tiny white beast appeared to smile, as much as a squirrel with a mouth full of testicles can smile.

Suddenly, the squirrel bit down harder than it seemed was possible, and then quickly disappeared deep into the forest.

3

"Oh my God, guys. Best. Zombie. Horde. Ever." Toby's friends agreed as the credits rolled on the latest episode of The Shambling Horde. Morty hit the mute button, silencing the big screen TV. "The way Darren swung that mace and destroyed, like, ten at a time was awesome!"

"Pretty cool, but haven't you ever wondered about the practicality of a mace in a zombie apocalypse? Seems like you'd be more productive with an ax or a pointy stick, right?" Dex pushed his glasses up for emphasis and definitely not because they were creeping down his nose because of his oily skin.

As he usually did, Morty spoke for the others. "Dude, it's just a television show. Just ooh and ahh at the visual effects and move on. Don't overthink it. It's not like that sort of thing would ever happen in real life."

4

"Police Station. Officer Stanton speaking."

"Hey Marilyn. This is Gerald Roth. We got a situation here at the house."

"What's goin' on, Jerry?"

"Well, the house is surrounded by some weird-lookin' squirrels."

"Weird how?"

"Well, they're kinda... pale... and they're moving in a jerky fashion. Squirrels is graceful creatures. Ain't never seen 'em move like that."

"Well, maybe that's just the way them albino squirrels are. Albino squirrels are pretty rare, y'know."

"Do albinos talk? 'Cause these are talking. Sorta. Kinda like a chant: 'Nutzzz... Nutzzzz...'"

"Well, that's certainly odd. How many are there?"

"A lot. Maybe hundreds? The dog got loose and they did a number on him. I don't think it's safe for me to leave the house, Marilyn. And I'm afraid they're gonna find their way in here."

"Well, sit tight. I'll send a car over to check it out."

"Thanks, I'll just double-check the locks while I'm wai...aaagggghhhhh!"

"Jerry? Jerry? Are you still there, Jerry?"

5

"Can we stop at the FasGas and pick up some more snacks?" Dexter's sustainability plan involved more potato chips and cheese twists than the average teenager. "We have a whole other season to binge-watch."

"Sure," said Morty from behind the wheel of his ancient 1976 Plymouth Space Duster. The dust covering the car's dashboard was not from space, of course, but from several years of neglect. But the car was somewhat reliable and got him from point A to point B while he was saving up for something more millennial.

Toby was the first to see them. "Hey, guys? What the hell is that?"

"It's called 'music,' you uncultured snob," said Morty before he, too, saw them. He slammed his foot on the brake and the Duster responded appropriately, coming to a stop several inches away from the horde of pale squirrels.

Dexter made the first scientific observation. "They look like squirrels, but they're so... pale. Like Dorothy Sanders' porcelain skin, only whiter." Dexter drooled very slightly at the memory.

"We almost ran them over, yet they don't seem to see us," Toby said. "They all appear to be moving slowly toward town. And look at their tiny mouths. Is that blood? We should call somebody."

"Does that mean no more Horde marathon tonight?"

"I'm afraid so, Dex. Let's get to town, Morty. We need to warn everybody!"

6

"Can you help us, sir?" asked FBI Agent Max Milner.

The target of his query looked stunned even before he and his partner, Deena Schrödinger, approached. The man jolted to something similar to alertness. "What can I help you folks with?"

The high pitch of the man's response did not match the bulk of his frame and Milner and Schrödinger acknowledged this by giving each other a quizzical glance. Many of you will choose to interpret this as sexual tension between the two agents, but I assure you, it was simply a quizzical glance. Nothing more.

There was certainly no tongue involved with this quizzical glance.

"What?!" said the squeaky-voiced man, squeakier than before. Obviously irritated by the length of this quizzical glance that didn't involve any tongue or fondling. "What do you want?!"

"Ahem..." Max straightened his tie and tried to look casual and somewhat cool. The FBI-issued dark sunglasses were a nice touch. He waved off the beginnings of another quizzical glance from Schrödinger. "We're here because of some alleged disappearances... er, you have a very high-pitched voice."

"Yeah? Well, your fly's down and her high beams are on."

"Hey!" Schrödinger said as she buttoned her jacket. "It's cold up here!"

"Who's in charge here?" asked Milner.

"Do I look like Google? Police Station's two blocks that way." He waddled away from the pair in an awkward way that left Milner and Schrödinger glancing quizzically. Ten minutes and two cigarettes later, they made their way to the Police Station.



"Take me to your leader," Max said, holding up two fingers in the sign of peace. He believed he was making a Vulcan salute. "Seriously. Who's in charge?"

"Well, you'd be lookin' for the sheriff," Officer Marilyn said without looking up. "Sheriff Smitty. But he's been out all day. He's usually back in the office by lunchtime, but not today. Probably just takin' care of some family business."

"Ma'am, if you'd look up from that magazine... I didn't realize CatFancy was still a thing." Agent Schrödinger flashed her

badge, then nudged Max until he did the same. "We're here on official business, ma'am."

"We're investigating some alleged disappearances."

7

"What more can I say? I was going to fill up at the FasGas," Morty quietly explained to Toby as he was making sure the Duster was secure from vandals. "That weird squirrel horde blocked our way."

"But why wouldn't you say something? Now we're going to have to walk the rest of the way to town!"

"Sorry, man. My brain wasn't really thinking about anything except that pack of scary rodents."

Satisfied as he would ever be, Morty and his three friends started the walk back toward town.



You may have just noticed that last sentence and attempted mentally¹ to account for the friends that joined Morty in the car ride to the FasGas. There's Toby, from whose house they travelled to head toward the FasGas. There's Dexter, the nerdy friend, who first spoke up about the weird squirrel horde. But that's only two friends. Who is this third friend and why suddenly bring him up now, seven chapters into this story?

Well, as the narrator of this tale, I knew someone in the group was going to bite it and I didn't want you, the reader, to get too attached to this character by naming it, or including it in dialog between the other three characters. It's the same principle with farm animals. You know that, eventually, Wilbur's going to end up in a skillet, ultimately augmenting the eggs and buttered toast on your breakfast plate some Sunday morning, so you don't call him Wilbur.²

So, yes, three friends walking back toward town.

Now, we could assume that Morty, Toby, and Dex, make it back to town and warn the sheriff, who proceed to rally the town

1 Or possibly physically. We've never met and I don't presume to know how you count to three.

2 Or maybe you do, you sick bastard!

against the zombie squirrel horde, saving the town of Lake Waldo. But what fun would that be?

Or we could imagine that the dead, unnamed friend isn't dead in the classic sense, and, one-by-one, creeps up on each of the others, biting and turning them each into zombies. But that's just too predictable.

I'm going to keep you hanging for the moment, though. You'll need to wade through a couple more short chapters in order to see what happens to these guys.

8

"The old vinyl is fifty cents apiece, four for a dollar, books are a buck." The community yard sale was winding down and Peggy was thinking about the hot bubble bath awaiting her after the last of her family's old junk was distributed and the money was counted.

"How much for the marble squirrel?" asked the bargain hunter.

"What marble squirrel?"

9

"His name is James Hunt," explained Agent Schrödinger. "We were tipped off to some interesting tweets from his Twitter account, *@IHuntForTruth*. We believe he may have been abducted."

"Aliens?" asked Officer Marilyn.

"We believe they were Americans."

10

"Has anyone mentioned how quiet it's gotten?" Asked Toby. The forest's only illumination being a small Mag-Lite™ from Morty's glove compartment, they were only just able to see the path ahead.

"Maybe all the animals have turned in for the night," Morty replied.

"More likely they just 'turned,'" Dexter chimed in. "Hey, Morty? Where's whatsisname?"

"What's who's name?"

"The other guy. He sat beside me in the backseat? He's your neighbor or something, right?"

"It was just the three of us, Dexter. Me thinks you've had a bit too much of the sauce. You're hallucinating friends."

"No, I swear it. He was just behind me. I could hear him. Big guy, out of shape, like you. Only wheezier. I just noticed he'd stopped huffing and puffing."

Morty and Toby stopped. Morty pointed the Mag-Lite™ back down the path they'd just walked. "See? Nothing there."

Then, suddenly, some extreme huffing and puffing on the path ahead made them turn to reveal a round, angry face in the flashlight's beam.

"Really?" said the round, angry face in a very high-pitched voice. "You're gonna play that game again?"

There was a long silence as they all just stared at the round, less angry, pale and growing paler, face. "Guys? I think one of those weird squirrels attacked me."

"Attacked you where?" Toby asked.

"On the path back there, about five minutes ago, although maybe it was 10, or 2. Time seems to be slowing down. Or speeding up. I'm not sure which."

"Actually, I meant 'where, on your body, were you attacked?'"

"Is that important?"

"Are you bleeding from your wound?"

"Profusely. I'm starting to feel quite light-headed; there's so much blood."

Morty ran the beam of the Mag-Lite™ around his head, then methodically moved the beam down his body until it landed on a stream of blood shooting rhythmically from his upper thigh. He collapsed to the ground in a pool of crimson body syrup.

"Guys, look at his crotch."

11

"The Lake Waldo area isn't very big. I can't say that I've met everyone, but I'm very good at remembering names and I'm sure I'd know if there was a James Hunt living around here." Officer Marilyn's memory was a key component to the success of the LWPD since few in the department were any good at filing or reporting or the written word.

"We believe he was here on business," said Agent Milner.

"This is Lake Waldo. What sort of business could he be here on? The economy around here isn't exactly 'booming.' Even fishing the lake hasn't been relaxing since the Romita brothers set off that C4 a few months ago."

Agent Schrödinger extended a thick file folder seemingly from the ether, although likely from a secret pocket in her blazer. "James Hunt is a paranormal investigator."

"A 'ghostbuster'?"

"More likely an 'anything spooky and unexplained-buster'."

"What do you think he was investigating?"

"We're not sure, but he appeared to be researching *Sciurus carolinensis*, the Eastern grey squirrel."

"There have been a few calls about rabid squirrels since yesterday evening. Most of the callers reported the squirrels as looking weird or pale. We figured them to be albinos. We've seen more and more in the area over the years, so they're not that uncommon.

"Since we don't have the budget you big city folks have, the Deputy doubles as our Animal Control Unit."

"What are his qualifications?" asked Schrödinger.

"Her qualifications. She trained her cockatoo to verbally abuse solicitors. The Jehovah's Witness people have her name at the top of their do-not-call-under-any-circumstances list. It's not a very long list, from what I hear, but her name's at the top, in bold letters, underlined three times for emphasis."

"What would this deputy's name be? And where can she be reached?"

"Deputy John, and as of the last two hours, she hasn't responded to any radio calls. So I'm not certain where she is."

"You don't seem very concerned about her lack of response."

"I'm used to it. Deputy John is known to march to the beat of a different drummer. You'll see."

"Are you saying she's..."

"Just... Odd. The last message I sent asked her to check out a report of rabid squirrels at the Roth property. The address is 58 Cutler Road. It's about two miles west."

After watching Agents Schrödinger and Milner trying to enter the address into Google Maps, Officer Marilyn offered to drive them over herself.

12

Deputy John was a sturdy woman of sketchy origins. She was so well-known in the region surrounding Lake Waldo that there was a statue in her honor less than a block from Jake's Hardware Store and no fewer than six plaques throughout the town marking key moments from her life. Moments like her first arrest, first confirmed kill, and the first restraining order placed against her.³

Before her stint with the Lake Waldo Police Department, she was known to the community as Grandma John. She was, and had always been, someone that you just did not fuck with. Not to say that she was off-limits sexually. In that respect, she was legendary. There is even a commemorative plaque on the door of Room 407 at the Mallard Hotel on Main thanking her for keeping the establishment profitable well past its prime.

Because trouble and adversity had a tendency to follow her around like a lovesick moose, she signed up with the Lake Waldo Police Department. Becoming a member of the law enforcement community allowed her the freedom to kick ass and get paid for it. There was a lot of paperwork involved, but that's why Assistant Deputies were created.

Deputy John's Assistant Deputy had mad skillz when it came to compiling reports. His name was Oliver, but after Deputy John began calling him "Staples," his mother would be the only person to ever call him by his given name. Even his paychecks were made out to "Staples."⁴

3 As told in Issue 57, the Rejected Monsters #.

4 This led to some confusion when an office supply store opened up in the nearby town of Winnebago Falls. This ultimately resulted in a somewhat substantial windfall for Oliver and an epic Going Out of Business Sale for the chain's Winnebago store. The location is now a very profitable Office Depot.™

Currently, the Deputy and her Assistant were spraying long strands of fire from the flamethrowers hanging from their shoulders by heavy canvas straps. They were defending themselves from a horde of tiny undead rodents. The weapons were not issued by the Lake Waldo Police Department, but were part of Deputy John's private collection. Staples noted that the serial numbers were conveniently missing from items in this private collection, but he had learned many years prior that these things are best left out of reports involving the Deputy. It had taken him six months to recover.

The squirrels were squealing with each pass of the flames, but they continued their advance, just a bit crispier. Deputy John needed a moment to consider her options. The pair retreated. There was a brick building 150 yards to their south that appeared sturdy enough to buy them some time. Deputy John motioned to Staples that they needed to get back to that building quickly.

Extinguishing their weapons as they entered the structure, they were greeted with what appeared to be a laboratory. Surrounded by a miscellany of equipment was a small man with round glasses and a thick white beard.



"I know what you're thinking," he said. "And I suspect that you are too late."

13

After approximately fifty-eight seconds of silence, staring at the bloodied pelvic area of the dead teenager, Morty chose to break the silence.

"Seriously, Dex. I've never seen this guy before. Toby?"

"Nope. I got nothing."

"Guys, I don't think it matters." Dexter continued to stare at the lifeless body, as well as the lifeless body's crimson-soaked pants. Softly, Dexter said, "He's gone."

"Listen! Do you hear that?" They all held their breath and opened their earholes.

"I don't hear anything," said Dexter. "Quit screwing around."

"No, seriously. It sounds like slow skittering."

"That doesn't make sense Morty. By definition, 'skittering' is not 'slow'."

"Just listen numb nu--, er, dummy."

"Nice one, Mort," teased Toby. Then, they all heard it and it did, in fact, sound like the skittering gait of a rodent as if it were being played back in slow motion. The sound was coming from every direction.

And it was getting louder.

14

Officer Marilyn and the agents quickly evaluated the exterior scene as they arrived. The ground appeared to be scorched with bits of movement within the scorchiness.

"What the hell is that?!" Officer Marilyn asked at a slightly higher register than her normal speaking voice.

"That... is above your pay grade. And, based on our 2015 Federal Income Tax Returns, just within the boundaries of ours. Schrödinger?"

"The moving bits seemed to be heading toward that brick building, but they aren't moving very quickly. Milner? I'd like to know what's inside that building."

Milner then suggested that Officer Marilyn remain in the police car while he and Agent Schrödinger checked out the building. An impressive burst of expletives convinced the agents that perhaps they could utilize Officer Marilyn's extensive knowledge of the local community in order to assist them in their evaluation of the situation inside the building and allowed her to accompany them in their investigation.⁵

5 The length of this sentence was designed to represent the length of time Officer Marilyn's expletive-filled rant toward the agents lasted. Even if the footnote you're reading is included, however, I still come up short by thirty-six seconds. So, if you would be so kind, please close your eyes and hum for thirty-six additional seconds before continuing the story. Thank you.

15

Manfred the Mystical was not a particularly good accountant. Luckily for him, he was a magician.⁶ He wasn't a particularly talented magician either.

While Manfred's peers were performing for large- to medium-sized audiences, with some occasional accounting work on the side, Manfred was performing for smaller, shorter, audiences. Usually in the ballpark of two- to three-feet.

He was currently in the middle of his act, having just made three doves⁷ appear from a cage secreted within the small table, routed through a small opening in the table upon which sat an oversized top hat lying upside-down over the opening.

"Hey kids! Want to see me pull a rabbit outta this hat?"

Among the twenty-one children attending Kevin Anderson's 12th birthday party, just one child was answering Manfred's questions.

"Sure. Why not?" Kevin really just wanted the party to be over. He hated parties. He really just wanted to go inside and play ultra-violent video games.

Manfred reached into his hat and froze, his eyes wide in an expression of shock. It didn't feel like the rabbit he'd hidden in the other secret compartment. It felt like fur, but it felt matted and sticky-wet.

Then something bit his hand hard. Like teeth-on-bone hard.

"Aaaaagggghhhhh!!!" he screamed.

"Aaaaagggghhhhh!!!" the children screamed in unison. Manfred removed his bloody hand from the hat. Pulsing fountains of blood sprayed the birthday crowd. "Aaaaagggghhhhh!!!" he screamed again.

"Aaaaagggghhhhh!!!" the children screamed again. It was almost as if they were having a conversation in fear.

Suddenly, a bloody rabbit jumped from the top hat, followed immediately by two albino squirrels, their little mouths haloed with a mixture of bunny blood and Manfred's Mystical Hemoglobin. Manfred fainted.

The children continued their screams as the zombie squirrels made their way through the crowd of kids, gathering their nuts for the coming winter.

6 Seriously. Would you have your taxes done by someone named Manfred?

7 Technically, they were pigeons.

Inside, Kevin Anderson's parents were having some decaffeinated coffee with their medicinal marijuana.

"Listen to those squeals of delight! We should hire a magician every year!"

16

"Too late?" asked a winded Deputy John. "Sounds like you know more about these weird squirrels than you think anyone thinks you would know. You know?"

There was a momentary pause while the small man considered whether the deputy was insulting him. "Yes," he eventually responded. "I do know."

"We just set hundreds of those things on fire and they still kept right on coming!" Staples was speaking loudly, but not so loud that additional exclamation points or capital letters were required. "What the hell are those things?!"

"I'm afraid the zombie apocalypse has begun. Those squirrels are undead."

"They'll be re-dead when I'm done with 'em." Deputy John scanned the room for anything that could be McGyvered into a makeshift weapon.

"With all due respect, Deputy John, how do you kill something that's already dead?"

"In the movies," said the diminutive man, "they kill them by shooting them in the head."

"In the movies," replied Staples, "the zombies have bigger heads."

"I guess we'll just need to get inventive," said Deputy John, grabbing a weed whacker from a wall rack. "Does this thing work?"

"Gassed and ready to go," said the tiny, bespectacled man. "And could you ask the narrator of this story to stop calling me small? I'm 5 foot, 8."

The lawn trimmer was alive with the first pull of the starter cord. Deputy John told the two disproportionately-sized men to stay there in the building, and left to go squirrel hunting.

The FBI agents and Officer Marilyn watched as the deputy burst from the building, weed whacker raised high, shouting a war cry that sounded very much like "The tribe has spoken!"

"Well, that's something you don't see every day," said Agent Milner. "And we've seen some pretty freaky stuff."

"Just wait," replied Officer Marilyn. "She's just getting warmed up."

17

Hope was dwindling as the creepy sounds of what our teenaged trio believed might be albino vampire squirrels grew louder and presumably closer. Then another sound, something metallic and twangy, was mixed in with the slow, skittering noises. This new sound grew more distinct, until the source emerged on the path ahead of them.

The source was a mouth harp. Playing this mouth harp was a man-boy wearing a bicycle helmet with several large chunks of foam missing from the top and sides, as well as a T-shirt reading "One-Piece Bathing Suit Inspector."⁸

"Andy?" said Toby.

Andy Miner was Toby's next-door neighbor. The mouth harp was a prized possession that he had bought with money earned from mowing lawns in the neighborhood. Andy's services were cheap enough that Toby's parents preferred not to hire from within for maintenance of their lawn.

Andy stopped playing long enough to say "Hey..." He quickly started playing again for a couple of seconds before stopping again to say "...Toby." He quickly started playing again.

"What are you doing, Andy?"

Before Andy could pause to answer, Dexter chimed in. "I don't think they like the sound of that thing he's playing."

Andy stopped again. "Mouth..." Briefly started and stopped again. "...harp." And continued.

"Listen," said Dexter. "They seem to be going away."

"Andy! You need to follow us back to town!" He said this loudly and slowly.

8 This was written in crayon and Sharpie.

Having wiped out the entire horde of zombie squirrels, each tiny zombie squirrel head detached from each zombie squirrel body by way of a moderately-thick nylon cord whipping around a core at a rate of approximately 7,000 RPM, Deputy John wiped the sweat from her forehead as she walked confidently toward the agents and Officer Marilyn.

"FBI? You must be here for the meth lab. Staples has your guy in there." She pointed toward the brick building.

The agents glanced at each other quizzically.

"Geez, you two," said Deputy John. "Get a room."

EPILOGUE

Toby, Morty, and Dexter made it back to town without incident, thanks to Andy's mouth harp. They alerted their parents, who made some calls and assured them that all was well.

Andy Miner was unanimously elected as an honorary member of the Lake Waldo Community Marching Band.⁹

Agents Milner and Schrödinger were discovered later to be subjects in an alien hypnosis experiment. Three years prior, they were abducted by Ko the Elder, a mentalist from the planet Ionesky, and made to perform unspeakable acts on a stage in Ionesky's version of Las Vegas. All with almost no recollection of the events save the occasional quizzical glance.

Officer Marilyn Stanton was granted an extra five days of vacation for her help on the paperwork generated by the zombie outbreak. Unfortunately, because of the increased workload generated by the paperwork generated by the zombie outbreak, her next opportunity to use her extra five days of vacation would fall somewhere in the neighborhood of five to six years in the future.

9 What? Your community doesn't have its own dedicated marching band? Where do you live? Russia?

Sheriff Smitty is taking care of some family business.

Two years later, the 1976 Plymouth Space Duster would be sold on eBay for \$168.72. The only bidder would be an individual going by the handle "IhuntForTruth."

The Romita Brothers eventually moved to Los Angeles and would become visual effects experts for five of the eight largest-grossing action movies of the '20s. By 2030, they would have less than six fingers combined.





Lists are a part of all of our lives. We might as well have a bit fun with them, eh? Each week, we'll post a new Listeria topic on Twitter and let the fun begin. Here's some of the best from the last few months.

Nicknames for the Blizzard of 2016

- Clustersnow
- Best-in-Snow
- Snowplow-a-palooza
- Blyzztopia
- Snowchella
- Winter Storm Big Johones
- Snowgasm '16
- Cantore. James Cantore.
- Blizzilla



What Happened to My Cat's Other Eight Lives?! Huh?!

1. Death-By-Catnip
2. That toaster didn't toss itself into the bathtub
3. I probably shouldn't have named him "Kervorkian"
4. Brutally beheaded by the neighbor's cat, ironically named "Isis"
5. Accidentally crushed by the biggest ball of twine in Minnesota
6. Worst. Hairball. Ever!
7. Probably shouldn't have used real poison during re-enactment of "Romeo and Juliet"
8. That Fugu-flavored Fancy Feast may not have been properly prepared

What the Groundhog Saw

- Fox News coverage of the Iowa Caucuses, crawled back in his hole, so we'll have nine more months of mudslinging
- "Dirty Grandpa" and now we can expect six more weeks of terrible movies
- I don't know WHAT he saw, but he can't UN-see it.
- His own reflection and wonders what the hell he's done with his life
- What you did last summer and thinks you need more sun
- Bieber's penis. Now he's blinded himself.

Dirty Peanuts

- Marcie is now a lesbian porn star that goes by the name "Peppermint Panties"
- Then: Schroeder; Now: Lady Gaga
- Dominatrix Lucy still charges five cents per consultation
- Linus will not leave his New York apartment unless he's wearing chiffon

Things I Was Surprised to Discover Residing in My Hockey Playoff Beard During the Second Round

- Dessert
- Forty-two cents
- My other sock
- The winning lottery ticket I swear I bought last month
- The restless spirit of Jimmy Hoffa
- Fingernail clippings (although, oddly, not my own)

Rejected Old Wives' Tales

- Starve a fever, feed a cold; teach a fever to starve...
- Set a fire for a man and he is warm for a night. Set a man on fire and he's warm for the rest of his life.
(submitted by *Midnight Tree Bandit* via *Facebook*)
- A carrot a day will blind a rabbit for a week

Turkey Bands

- Chuck Cranberry
- The Gobble-Gobble Dolls
- Wings
- Drum-Styx
- Bachman-Turner Overcooked
- Ringo Starr (aka Richard Sturkey)
- Wish-bone Burnett
- The Gravy Dead
- Barenaked Ladles
- The Police-Can-I-Have-Some-More-Turkey?
- Average White Meat
- The Canned Cranberries
- The Count Baste Orchestra

Mock the Terrorists

- Swap out their regular coffee with Folger's Crystals
- Replace all of the AK-47s with exact replicas that instead eject a flag that says "Bang!"
- Jihadi John's Bathroom Reader

Rejected Jeb Bush Campaign Punctuation

- Jeb?
- {Jeb}
- J.E.B.
- #jeb
- J*b

Things to Do With Your Extra Daylight Savings Hour

- That bag of Halloween candy ain't gonna eat itself
- Rock out with my clock out
- Swap the battery in the smoke detector with the battery in the clock
- My ninja training will finally pay off. I will complete my mission under cover of night and a secret hour

Creepy Christmas

- Gingerbread Sex Dungeon
- Christmas Meat Ornaments
- Jingle Belts
- The Nutsmacker Suite
- Uncle Bob's Christmas Goose (if you know what I mean?)
- Pumpkin Spice Egg Nog

New Fears That a 2017-20 Republican Presidency Would Bring

- If you don't own a gun, you had better learn to speak Canadian.
- Democrat Internment Camps
- The next Republican president will build a wall around every Mexican restaurant in the United States.
- Official Presidential Correspondence will be done entirely via Post-It Notes
- New Trump Wing added to the renamed Trump House (1600 Trumpsylvania Ave., Trumpington, DT)

Best of/Worst of 2015

- Best: Dr. Phil's ratings; Worst: Dr. Phil's audience.
- Best State to Make a Living: Texas; Worst State to Live In: Texas.
- Best Man: Larry; Worst Man: Larry's boss, Sid.

Got an idea for a list to be featured in a future installment of Listeria? Email us at submissions@nationalpasquinade.com with at least three bullet points for each list suggestion.

Contributors to Listeria include: The Midnight Tree Bandit, and the exhausted staff of National Pasquinade.

