



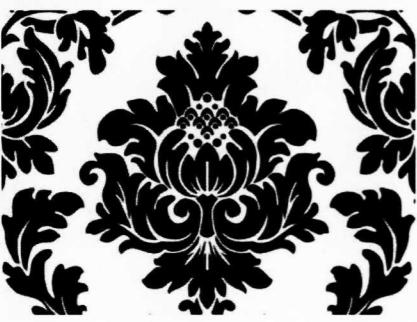
*Issue 002*

# The Absurdist

- Fiction Mag -

*FREE*

*October 2017*



# The Absurdist

Issue 002

October 2017

- Featuring -

Anthony Ausiello

Chad Gayle

Gherk

Ximena Gutiérrez

Kate LaDew

De Poco

JC Reilly

Jon Strode



Luang Pu Thuat's  
first Skynyrd concert

De Poco • Portland, OR

JGL  
Anthony Ausiello  
Westfield, NJ

Just as the subway doors start to slide shut, a chubby man-child clad in purple corduroys and a Sandman t-shirt two sizes too small leaps up from his corner seat on a south-bound D train and wedges himself between the closing doors, shouting, "I hate you Joseph Gordon-Levitt! I hate you." The doors finally shut, expelling the man like the head of a squeezed zit onto the platform. He remains standing on the same spot he landed, face pressed dangerously close to each passing window as the train pulls away. A final, muffled "I hate you" trails off as the platform recedes and the train plunges into the darkness of the tunnel. Joseph Gordon-Levitt, the actor, remains frozen in his seat while his eyes scan the subway car from left to right then back again. His last breath swirls timidly, trapped at the edge of his throat, as if its

release would solidify the last several surreal moments into reality.

His morning started poorly. Going to the gym, the one conveniently located just around the corner from his Upper West Side apartment, is how he likes to begin his day. More so, it is how he needs to begin his day. A vigorous workout clears and focuses his mind. Restores him. But this morning, he found the doors of his gym locked, and worst, bandaged shut by reams of police tape. Then the heavens conveniently decided to rip open and unleash a thunderstorm of biblical proportions. An empty cab was nowhere to be found. His gym has a twin branch downtown on West Broadway, but he hates going downtown, hates the subway, certainly hates sitting drenched on the subway. And now there's this guy that just shouted at him and jumped off the train. He lowers his gaze and exhales, satisfied that the outburst astonishingly hasn't drawn any additional attention. *New York City*, he reflects, *just another*

crazy.

"People need to be honest about their tolerance to risk aversion," a whisper into his ear, startles him. He wonders when the seat next to him became occupied. The passenger beside him, a young man of similar height and build, but dressed in an Italian suit, a crisp white monogrammed shirt with french cuffs, and regal purple silk tie fastened in a perfect windsor, leans in a little too close and in a more conversational tone, continues, "If I can be perfectly frank, I'd like to be able to start just one goddamn day without an irate client screaming at me. You play the market at all?"

"I'm sorry, what?" Joseph Gordon-Levitt replies squinting in confusion. The other passenger locks eyes with him and repeats, "The market, you play the market at all?" "No. No, I don't," Joseph Gordon-Levitt answers, shaking his head, slowly leaning back away from him.

"You should," the other passenger states matter of factly, lowering his chin in emphasis, "If you can handle it, that is." He begins to turn his head away then snaps it back, adding, "You have to know yourself. Not like that guy." The lights flicker and the train jolts to a sudden stop. "What are you talking about?" Joseph Gordon-Levitt asks, his voice rising. "That guy," the other passenger explains, gesturing at the doors with an outstretched finger, "Client of mine. Ex-client, I suppose. Worth millions. Wouldn't think it to look at him, right? Can't go on appearances. Last thing you should go on." He takes a breath through his nostrils. "Made him a little money, then lost him a lot of money. Happens." His eyes widen. "But he's the one who told me he wanted to hunt the white whale."

Joseph Gordon-Levitt stares into the eyes of the other passenger, exasperated, mouth open wide but silent as if waiting for some rational commentary of the scene on hand to spring forth, but before any illumination emerges, the other passenger reaches two fingers into the inside pocket of his suit jacket and with a flick of his wrist extends a business card. Joseph Gordon-Levitt watches his hand

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2017



rise and take the card. He looks down at it. It reads: Joseph Gordon Levitt (unhyphenated), Vice President, Argo Securities. Joseph Gordon-Levitt, the one with the hyphen, looks from the card to the passenger's monogrammed sleeve where the script letters JGL further confirm his identity. JGL leans forward noticing Joseph Gordon-Levitt's purple nylon gym bag and asks, "You work out?" Joseph

Gordon-Levitt nods. JGL smirks and nods also. He inquires, "What's your thing? Free weights?" And he makes two fists and curls them both up to his shoulders. "Spin?" He pedals his impeccably shined shoes in two quick revolutions. "Zumba?" Shoes drop to the floor, slide forward and back in a tight Latin shuffle. He adds a quick shake of the shoulders to finish. He purses his lips for a moment, shakes his head, and says,

"Not me. I want exercise, I either work or fuck."

With that the train lurches forward, continuing on its path. JGL turns back, the exchange over as abruptly as it began. He faces forward and stares out the window opposite them. Joseph Gordon-Levitt does the same. Their reflections fade and reappear repeatedly, as the black tunnel walls streak by and the train descends. ■

## WATERLOO DOESN'T FIX A LIGHTBULB

Kate LaDew  
Graham, NC

Waterloo immediately forgot the repairman's name and didn't ask him to repeat it. After four hours, the time had passed. He watched the dirt stained fingers grappling with the half dozen cords in the overhead light fixture and felt guilty. After all, here Waterloo was, just standing around in his nice, cool apartment, doing nothing of worth for anybody, while this nameless repairman endeavored to bring light to his tiny world. It was enough to make a man want to do something about the state of things. "I'll do something about the state of things," Waterloo said to himself. Three hours before and an hour after Waterloo had forgotten his name, the repairman asked if there was any water he might have. In response, Waterloo had shrugged. He was beginning to think it had been the wrong move. Now, four hours later, Waterloo almost went to the kitchen, opened a cupboard and retrieved a clear glass with stripes at the top and filled it from the sink with water. Almost. Watching the repairman in his work, Waterloo decided a little chat, a little bonding, a little encouragement and reassurance was what the repairman really wanted. Some sign of connectedness between the two men, some show of understanding. That's what he had meant by water. Let us drink from the same stream and so become brothers.

Waterloo took a step towards the living room. Then another and another. Soon

The repairman didn't say anything. Waterloo felt like pushing him off the ladder. ■

## BUTTERFLIES IN MANHATTAN

Chad Gayle  
New York, New York

They arrived on a September evening that made the sultry, steamy days of summer seem like a distant memory, settling silently on buildings large and

small, on signs and awnings, on lights and lamp posts, on phone booths and garbage cans, a monochromatic blanket of monarch butterflies.

They arose at dawn, a magical cloud of colored confetti, and they were everywhere, circling rooftops, mottling the glass and steel of skyscrapers, and stuttering through intersections in waves that wouldn't stop for red or yellow lights. They hovered and dipped and climbed and dropped; they rested on doorknobs, clung to coffee cups, and became trapped in revolving doors. Colliding with New Yorkers who staggered, stupefied, through the butterfly fog, the monarchs lit on hats and in hairdos, danced about the faces of the city's shocked inhabitants, and peppered dresses and suits and blouses with unwelcome blots of orange.

They were a beautiful menace, visitors with chalk wings that gummed up air conditioners, shuttered food carts and sidewalk cafes, and snarled traffic. Buses inched along at a pace even more sluggish than normal; distracted drivers struck slipping cyclists and ran their cars onto sidewalks. Dazzled entomologists carrying nets and notebooks gawked in crosswalks, hurriedly plucking specimens from the sky.

Enterprising New Yorkers set up sidewalk tables where they hawked insect repellent, goggles, and gas masks while commuters called in sick or took their vacations early or simply failed to show up for work.

Restaurant owners complained of the rising costs of doing business in Manhattan, as their wait staff were now required to remove tiny butterfly carcasses from stove hoods and

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The Museum  
Ximena Gutiérrez  
Bogotá, Colombia

*These people are quite serious  
Because life, as they say, is quite serious  
They try to be discreet  
And move even less and less each time.*

ovens and bowls of soup. With so many tourists reluctant to do their shopping in the city, the stores along Fifth Avenue began to close their doors, and Wall Street sounded the alarm, warning investors of a precipitous decline in profits.

Weeks after the mass migration of Lepidoptera, there was some talk of a recession, but then the bubbles began to appear: transparent structural containment systems that were suddenly installed at key points in the city to create butterfly-free zones.

They covered the tops of tour buses. They wreathed the observation deck of the Empire State Building and the roofs of fashionable skyline bars. The best of them were made of clear polyethylene, but knockoffs constructed from sheets of plexiglass were available within days, and they were inflated and erected in every part of Manhattan, in public spaces downtown and in Times Square and in parks large and small.

New Yorkers imprisoned in their apartments went back outside. Sidewalk cafes reopened, protected by bubbles that were painted with spotted monarch wings, and specially designed rolling bubbles took over the city's bike lanes, allowing young and old to exercise outdoors in insect-free environments. As the city embraced its bubbles, tourists flocked to the island once more; in Central Park, a giant bubble was raised above the Meadow, where a three day butterfly-themed concert was expected to attract fifty-thousand spectators and butterfly enthusiasts.

Manhattan's mood brightened. Retail sales rebounded as the shops that had been forced to shut their doors started doing brisk business. With the stock

market soaring, nearly everyone in Manhattan was pleased, as pleased as people dashing from one clear plastic bubble to the next can be.

The butterflies, unfortunately, were not nearly as happy.

Entomologists reported alarming declines in the overall butterfly density in Manhattan, particularly around the city's major landmarks. The Mayor proposed that a butterfly census be taken, and New Yorkers were urged not to swat or

step on the city's butterflies if they could help it. There were calls in the papers for a pro-butterfly march down Broadway; a monarch conservation group occupied a public space downtown and made a series of demands connected to the protection of the city's butterfly swarm. Windows hazy with butterflies became transparent. The pasty mush of butterfly bodies that had lathered the sidewalks thinned to a series of streaks that blended into the round gum stains dotting the

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concrete. Citizens who'd subsisted in a cloud of organic insect repellent realized that their insect problem was no longer a problem.

And then, on a cloudy, dreary Sunday at the end of September, what remained of the slender horde drifted away from the city, settling over the harbor and a small part of Staten Island, where the tiny wings of its many monarchs fluttered for the last time.

The skyscrapers stood naked beneath the empty bowl of heaven. Strips of clear plastic drifted across the streets while sanitation workers pushed brooms, cleaning up the mess the butterflies had left behind. The bubbles were deflated; sheets of plexiglass were loaded on cargo ships bound for China.

There was some talk, by a vocal minority of butterfly haters, of raising huge nets along the shores of Manhattan to protect the borough from future swarming events tied to butterflies, moths, or even fireflies, but ideas like these were largely ignored. For the most part, the city's citizens simply went back to the lives they'd lived before the monarchs had descended from the sky.

But for the children of New York, everything had changed. They'd entered a new world, a world where the ordinary could become extraordinary at any moment, and they began to dream dreams that were strange and bright and full of wonder, dreams that would bind them together for years to come. ■

## WEED 'EM AND REAP

*JC Reilly  
Atlanta, GA*

You bring home packets of seeds, for cucumbers and pumpkins, but also for pocket watches, pencils, and Pigmy Apes. You say it's cheaper to grow them ourselves. I take the seeds, plant rows of watches and pencils, go to sow Pigmy Apes between the sunflowers and the corn stalks, turn soil with a red spade.

The sunflowers, angry, drink in the spade's hue, reduce metal to ash, and turn a shade of drunk sunset. They pull the dirt closer in on themselves like girls wrapping themselves in coats. "Don't you dare plant those apes here," they cry. "They are very ill-bred."

(The back of the seed packet claims Pygmy Apes will grow between 4 and 6 inches when mature, and that they are known to whistle frequently. Of their behavior, however, there's no mention.)



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I look at you for guidance - you can always reason with the garden - but you are busy preparing the soil for the pumpkins while singing the sauerkraut aria from a faux-Wagnerian opera you've written. You pay me no mind. You hit the aria's high C as with a billystick. The sunflowers and I wince.

"Could they be any worse than the Dobermans?" I ask, reminding them of last year's crop. (Rather than growing to a nice size to display in our Waterford crystal vase, the mob of Dobermans, still green on the vine, harvested themselves early and marked the trees at the edge of the property before escaping forever into the woods. The sunflowers were badly trampled in the fracas, and clearly have not forgiven me.)

The sunflowers cross their leaves in front of their stems like folded arms, and sigh. "Probably not. But if you must plant primates in the garden this year, place them by the fence. They won't bother us so much, if they grow over there."

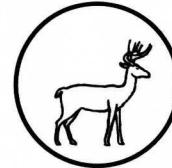
I would ask your opinion of this arrangement, since you usually have set ideas about garden geography, but you appear to be arguing with a vole over access to some dirt. The vole seems to be winning. Typical.

The sunflowers are waiting on me to make a decision. I bow to their request, knowing that at least Pygmy Apes can take directly to the trees once ripe, and spare me another year of the sunflowers' resentment in full-bloom. ■

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