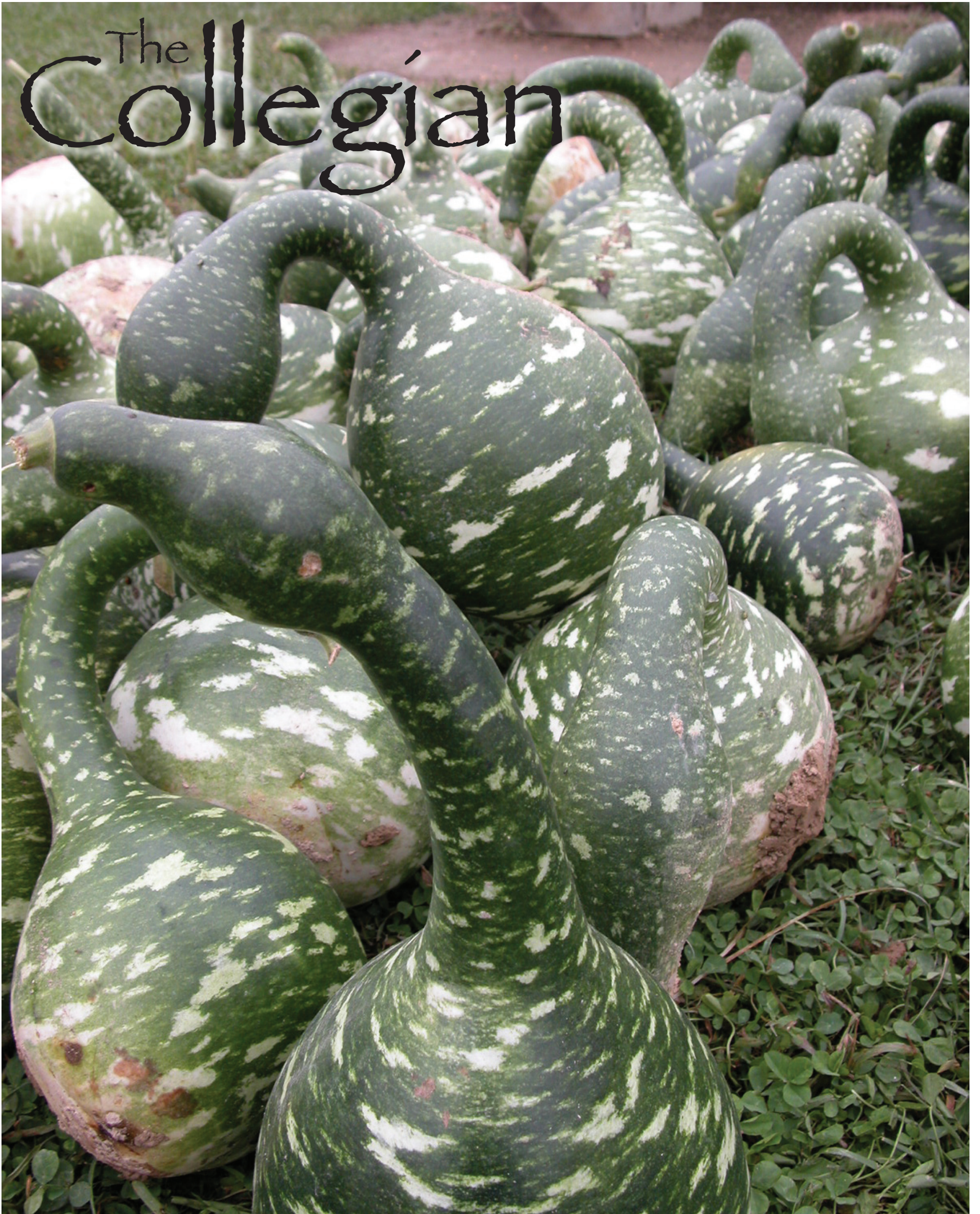


The Collegian



“with the popped collar look, even girls can have erections..”

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The Collegian does not discriminate on any basis. Please watch where you fly this October.

Movie Review

Garden State is Pure Gonzo

by Pete Knox

Since Hunter S. Thompson created Gonzo Journalism with his writings over thirty years ago, there have been many followers of this style both in written prose and visual art. However, no work has completely lived up to the unique standards of Gonzo Journalism like Zach Braff's (NBC "Scrubs") directorial debut, *Garden State*, which was released this summer.

In his book *The Great Shark Hunt*, Thompson declares that Gonzo Journalism is based on "William Faulkner's idea that the best fiction is far more true than any kind of journalism – and the best journalists have always known this." This idea easily transcends into the world of film where the camera portrays the perspective of both the eye and mind of the journalist, or in most cases, the main character. Hunter S. Thompson said that "probably the closest analogy to the ideal [Gonzo Journalist] would be a film director/producer who writes his own scripts, does his own camera work and somehow manages to film himself in action, as the protagonist or at least a main character."

That's where *Garden State* fits the bill. Zach Braff wrote this mainly non-fictional autobiographical screenplay based on his own childhood in New Jersey. Braff received a mere 2.5 million dollars from a mortgage banker to finance the movie, and directed this film, casting himself in the main role. Not only are those ballsy moves for a small time actor in a mildly popular television series, but they are successful stabs at true Gonzo reporting, as the Good Doctor Thompson has defined it.

Garden State is not just the latest representation of the same Gonzo style that *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* attempted to depict (Thompson himself admitted *Fear and Loathing* was a failed attempt as a true Gonzo piece). It also serves as the similar voice of a generation with all the necessary elements in place.

In *Fear and Loathing*, Raoul Duke sets out to find the American Dream during a weekend at Vegas. His adventure nearly parallels Braff's character Andrew Largeman's return to his hometown after a nine-year span of acting in Hollywood. While the characters Duke encounters on his trip seem savage and strange, Largeman confronts familiar faces he once knew but no longer recognizes. Duke believes his trip to be "a gross physical salute to the fantastic possibilities of life in this country" and accomplishes such through overindulgence in a plethora of illegal drugs and booze. While there are several scenes of drug use in *Garden State*, Largeman has, for the first time, stopped taking his daily doses of mentally-stabilizing prescription pills to discover his true self. Both films provide partners-in-crime for each main character; the dangerous Dr. Gonzo advises Duke and Sam the pathological liar and accompanies Largeman.

Even the cinematography in *Garden State* is reminiscent of the 1998 Gonzo film, with its purposely off-center and asymmetrical framing



of scenes and careful choice of contrasting background colors. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* contains absolutely no dialogue not contained in the original novel by Thompson and therefore a great deal of inner monologue is utilized in its presentation.

Even the soundtracks are able to encapsulate the spirit of their respective times. Zach Braff obtained the rights to include every song he had in mind for the film, a rare achievement for a first-time director. The music in the film is just as important as the dialogue in denoting the trials and aspirations of each period.

If *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is "a vile epitaph for the Drug Culture of the Sixties" (Thompson) then *Garden State* is similarly a cultural representation for this generation. Written and directed by our slightly older peer still in his twenties, Braff provides insight to a generation raised by dysfunctional families and prescription drugs without a place to call home, surrounded by people who are "okay with being unimpressive" but forced to grown up. While Kevin Smith was able to capture the cultural transformation of the nineties with his independent Gonzo film *Clerks* in 1994, Zach Braff is the new voice for this century with two more films already in the works.

Thompson, Hunter S. *The Great Shark Hunt*. Summit Books. 1979
"Garden State" and "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas" Online. <<http://www.imdb.com>>. Sept. 23, 2004.