

First Class

UPON INGESTION
THE PLEASURE WILL BE YOURS
11



AZZOUNI - BROCKI - CASTLEMAN
CATLIN - CHAPMAN - CROCKER
DORSETT - EVANS - EVERY - FOX
FRANKS - HOLSTAD - MAROVSK
NEWELL - NIDITCH - PHILLIPS
SENKUS - WEBER - WELLS

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ELEVEN**

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The Unabomber Tells All

JODY AZZOUNI

It's usually true, I guess, *ex nihilo, nihil fit*;
but not in set theory. *There*, in the beginning:
innocent \emptyset ,
but {nothing up either sleeve: for notice
the quote marks to come}: 'e', a lonely
chunk of hieroglyph, and presto, a universe.
Admittedly, it's only set-theoretic {although
with transcendental ellipses}; and,
admittedly, brackets are needed
{the mathematician's trip wires};
but we know singularities {of whatever sort}
are by law tricked into giving birth.

We all begin small, don't we?: I started out
that way: trying to divide by 0; for I noticed
the essential thing: the smaller
the denominator, the bigger the quotient.
Somehow {wouldn't you know it?} 0 is just
too small; ∞ just too close.

But there's the key, right? Rapid growth?
Think of the insidious $f(x) = e^x$; boy,
does *that* start out slowly {logarithmically so}.
Get to 1, however, and suddenly it's all in a rush
{surpasses *every* polynomial, as it turns out}.

Don't get the impression that my interest
in the relative growth of functions is purely formal.
Explosions have implications, moral ones, no doubt. But
these are perhaps just details, just
a question of what remains after we've squashed flat
the singularity, smeared it out across the furniture
of the world: given {along the way} an academic
or 2 a new slant on the means of production
{the luddite irony of the prothesis}.

Do I sound cold-blooded? You forget
the ascetic beauty in all this:
Call it an idealization if you will:
starting from a real point {no width, no length,
no depth} and expanding in 4-space
{the equations nonlinear; forgive me
if I omit them}. Think of something like
a radially expanding sphere
muscling its way through its recipient,
its volume swelling as of r^3 ,
its surface area as of r^2 . But I digress.

Did I answer all your questions? Probably
not. You'd like to know: Do I drink? was
my mother kind to me? why didn't my brother
want all that money? did I use a hammer
when I built my house? do I have regrets?

Faultfinders

ANSELM BROCKI

“Saw a public TV show last night,” Harvey says to Laughing Mildred at the dreaded do-nut shop, which Harvey calls the Vestibule of Hell because of the druggies wolfing down coffee here between takes.

“It was about the switch from hunting and gathering to farming for a living.”

“Was Victor Mature in it?”

Mildred asks. “I’ve always had the hots for him.”

“Not that kind of show. Just this college guy talking. I always thought agriculture was this big, all-of-a-sudden human invention. Turns out they were forced into it cause they killed off all the mammoths and mastodons and couldn’t get by on the little stuff.”

“Sounds just like us.”

“Don’t you see? Maybe you and me and all these druggies are being forced into something that isn’t really our fault.”

“Like what? Living? I’ll

buy that,” Mildred says.

“Enforced idleness,” Harvey says. “Like we killed off all the work with computers and automation, and we don’t know how to live right anymore without work to keep us in line. Maybe it’s not our fault.”

“No way,” Mildred says.

“It was our fault back then, and it’s our fault now.

We’ve always been lousy at living.”

What Work Is

ALAN CATLIN

They routinely ask you, what else you have to do with your life?

What's your other job?

As if working split shifts, doubles, the red eyed raging hungover, running on depleted adrenaline levels days and nights, seeing The Future in a cracked shot glass, the amber liquid inside all the hours and minutes of those days and nights forming a hard, small viscous puddle in the middle of a cratered bar surface that looks like no man's land in some nightmare film version of The Wasteland.

So I say, "I'm independently wealthy. Actually, I do this for fun, getting paid is just a bonus."

And, if I'm in a real foul mood, I tell them something like the truth, "I'm doing in-depth field research for a human science experiment.

My thesis is set for review and possible publication like in the next few days, keep asking questions and there might be a whole section devoted to you."

And they laugh and laugh and laugh as if I were some kind of quick-witted, one-liner artiste, instead of a small piece in god's plan for the human comedy that always has a tragic ending no matter what part you play.

Sometimes I even tell them the title of the Work in Progress, although its rarely the same one or the real one.

Somehow today sort of feels like: Show Me the Way to the Next Whiskey Bar.

Last week it was Quiet Flows the John. Next week? Who knows?

Face Down on the Barroom Floor Ramada Inn/Silo 1974

She pushes open the swinging kitchen doors, eyes wide, hands shaking she says, "You've got to do something, they're tearing the place apart." In the rathskeller below, it sounds to the staff as if the dancing has gotten out of hand as if all of the feet are in the wrong part of the room and that there is no music but a new kind of nerve ending sound of glass meeting brick. On the floor of the lounge, five brothers are putting the finishing touches to a twelve hour day of solemn marriage rites and shots of 7 Crown with beer chasers along the bar, holding the night manager's head inert, free form kicking his face in the darkness as a waitress weeps, they run overturning tables and chairs as they go spinning table candles spread a thin hot sealing wax over blood on the wash and wear carpet.

This year, on the job training qualifies you for a merit badge in plastic surgery and seven days with a white batman mask, as the stitches heal, a mask you won't show off in public because Halloween isn't for another eight months and you're in no mood to answer questions.

Actually, there are some hidden benefits in a life-threatening beating; a week off, no questions asked, and the scars, later, to prove you'd done Mugging 101 and passed.

Upper Management show their gratitude for blood and time-loss with a spontaneous, in-depth criticism for all the things you did wrong in a crisis beginning with, "You should have nuked them with the fire extinguisher."

Or, "call the cops first, ask questions, later."

As if there was an operating telephone nearby to use.

As if one foam fire extinguisher could quell an indoor, no-rules Australian football game involving all the players from several teams, their next of kin and their fans, a congregation of Assholes that gave new meaning to the word chaos.

Walk On

He was up against
the side bar
and he'd been there
all of his life
touching him was
risking contracting
a fatal disease
but I had to do it,
"The bar is closing
down, you have to leave."
His eyes focused
on a point no one
else could see.
"Leave?" he said,
"I have weapons
sanctioned by the Lord."
"I hope they're
registered in Albany
County or else you're
in big trouble."
"I have transmitters
locked into invisible
orbiting satellites."

"I'll pass up my best FCC
line, would you like
me to call a cab
back to CDPC or would
you rather walk?"
"I have no money."
"You'll have to walk then,
it's not that far. Besides,
I'll bet you could use
the fresh air and exercise."
It was late November
and he didn't have a coat.
That was his problem.
He should have thought
of that when he left
the Loony Bin with
his spare change.
I was being hard on
lunatics that week, and they
were being hard on me.

After this last assault you're determined to file a claim with Workman's Compensation despite strict prohibition of any such claims by management no matter what the cause or nature of injury.

Compensation Board claims raise the Company's premiums.

But after a complete, comprehensive late night tour of all the Emergency Rooms in the Greater Capital District Area for a variety of on the job related injuries and nothing to show for them but permanent damage and lost wages, you do.

And Management says, "You're developing an attitude."

A Bad Attitude.

But when you tender your resignation a couple of months later, they change their tune.

"You have a Real Bad Attitude," they say with a smile as if you're to believe they don't mean it.

After all, they can't afford to lose you.

Who else will do all the dirty work?

Working Stiff

They like to work you day and night until your eyes start to bleed they don't	care about how you might feel unless they think you might not make it
--	---

Still, you show up for work.

You don't like it but this is your job and despite all the heat, the stuff and nonsense, you take a certain pride in being able to do something no else can do as well as you can.

Like walking out on a ledge and staying there, daring what will happen to happen.

But you can't shake the labels or the rap.

The Attitude. You've got a Bad Attitude.

Why bother, it's true, you do: it comes with the job.

It's what distinguishes you from the rest of the amateurs.

Mindgames

"Do you know Mary Beth?" he asks. "Everyone knows Mary Beth." I sd. "Why she was here just last week. We talked for over an hour." "How's she doing?" "Fine. Real fine. Still working in the same place Still hates it too. She was asking about Joe." "Yeah, she would. Do you know Joe?" "Not really, I've seen him though."	"He's a real pisser, Joe is. Did Mary Beth tell you about the time Joe dropped trou?" "Oh, no really?" "Yeah, it was at the New Year's Eve bash over at the Son's Hall. Freaked everyone right out in a hurry. You should get to know Joe, he's a real pisser." "I can tell." "Hey, man, when you see Mary Beth tell her I was by." "Sure will, dude." As if I knew who any of these people were.
--	---

You've cultivated this on-the-job trained self-image of a night time warrior in the trenches for so long you actually believe it.

Think that there's a war being fought with liquor bottles, beer steins, insults and drunken tirades instead of handgrenades, horseshoes and atomic bombs.

When asked how you do it, the answer is always the same, "If everyone were doing it would be easy and then what would become of us?"

A line from a movie about a bomb disposal unit.

And what you are doing is a kind of bomb disposal; the human atomic bomb around you and all of its components are always ready and waiting to go off.

And they're always at your disposal.

Because you're the head mad doctor.

The scientist with the rocket fuel.

The magic cure.

The liquid medicine.

Cripples

They looked as if they'd copped their last dimes out of a blind man's cup As if they rolled old ladies and infirm old men for their meals	There was nothing wrong with them drinking in my place that a couple of years behind bars couldn't cure you're no better than they are.
---	---

And you probably feel worse.

But you can never show it.

After all the show must go on.

And you have your professional pride.

Reference Question

"You see this guy?
when he came to
work for us
he had to look
Bud up in a
book—didn't know
the difference
between a bottle
of beer and a
bottle of booze
and just look
at him now."
I didn't hear that
I guess it's because
I know the boss man has
to score points with
the money men too
Just cause he hasn't any
thing better to do than
build himself up by knocking

someone else down has nothing
to do with me, I'm better
than that. I mean I can
take a joke as well as
anyone, I've been laughed
at too many times not
to know a joke when I
hear one. So later, when
the Boss Man asks me
for a Dewar's on
the rocks I have to laugh
What's he talking about?
He must be kidding me.
I might even have to look
it up in a book.
I don't let the door hit me in the ass on the way
out when I leave either.

Or turn out any of the lights.

I just make sure everything stops working the next day in a timed sequence like some kind of Alfred Hitchcock restaurant horror movie with they who remain as the unwilling characters.

I make sure all of my calls are put on call-waiting indefinitely or are misdirected to the back room of Rummy's Bat Cave where the derelict who answers the phone has been on a non-stop binge since 1937 and will forget what he is doing with the phone in his hand, mid-conversation and leave the line open forever, phone dangling against the wall like the sueless appendage that it is.

What the hell, it was only another job.

There's always more work once you've summited the plateau.

After all, bartending is just something you learn to do with your head while your body is making drink, is watching what's coming down in your world as it happens and surviving long enough to talk about it.

I guess that's what writing is all about, as well.

But what would I know about that, man, I'm just the bartender.

A Pro-fessional with an Attitude.

Or a character in a story. Or, maybe even one who creates characters.

Which one is it?

That would be telling and a bartender never tells.

That's against all the unwritten laws,

The Code of Ethics, Unprofessional.

Everyone Wants to Be a Bartender

It must be a great life- I'll bet all the girls proposition you- You must overhear some wild conversations- I'll bet all the waitresses are really wild and all of that free booze- All that easy money- You must make great tips here huh?- You must be a gambler- Who do you like in the- You know	where I can find some easy- I'm a little short- I know you guys always have bread can I bum- it's a great life real great and I've been beat up in some of the best joints in town too
---	--

Every word of this is true.

Everything I say is true.

Come to the tavern where I work now and sample one of the cocktails from my bar book of recipes with a personality called Killer Cocktails.

Better be nice; remember who's making those drinks you're going to put into your body.

Better yet, just read the book.

And see who gets the last laugh.

Or wait for the sequel, a Resurrection Man's Special, The Hair of the Dog That Bit Me.

That's me on the cover, not Lon Chaney Jr. dressed to kill as the Wolfman.

It happens to all the professionals after awhile, The Metamorphosis.

That's why they call the job work, man.



DIVER BY STEPAN CHAPMAN

Isabel and I

DANIEL CROCKER

I was in bed when my wife died. I wasn't sleeping, however. I was mad at her for not being home yet. I tossed in bed several times, beat our red blanket with the back of my hand. Then the knock came on the door (I've never had a phone). It was her mother. Her face was red. She was crying. A thin thread of slobber hung from her thick bottom lip, there was clear ball of snot ready to explode dangling from her left nostril, her hair was matted down on the left side.

"Isabel is Dead," she said. (hey, I rhymed) "She's dead...she's dead...she's dead...she's dead...she's dead...she's dead..." (she said)

She tried to put her meaty round arms across my shoulders around my neck I pushed her away we've never gotten along. More to the point I've never gotten along. Her bobbed red hair made me sick at my stomach. My wife's little sister, Andrea, was there too. She was white. She was like melting snow. It came to me my daughter had been in the car too. She was dead. Is dead. (she said)

"Get out of here." I told them both.

"Whaaa?" The fat lady asked. Her grotesque lips puckered from her face in two liver pink heaps.

"Whaaa?" She asked again. I could have retched she couldn't believe that I had told her to get out. She stood there frozen like a fat dumb buddha.

"Out." I said. I laughed. It was the first time I had ever had the guts to kick her out of my own house. It felt pretty damn good. I made sharp little growling noises deep within my throat, it's a natural reflex of mine when I'm angry.

My wife was (is) dead (she said) I couldn't sleep. I was mad I threw the blankets off of me in a mangled heap I opened the window the cold air blanketed me still I couldn't sleep. I didn't sleep the next night. I didn't sleep the next night. The next night I left town I moved to Rolla I was supposed to finish my college education. Here I am now. Here (blank) is now.

I've had this apartment for two weeks. I pay one hundred fifty dollars a month for it. I pay for it out of the insurance money I had left over after the double funeral. I dropped out of school got a little money for that too. Some scholarship money. I guess I screwed the system good.

This apartment is small it's box-like the ceiling is a low white lid the floor is a sticky pink tile the walls are dark brown plastic fake pine wood paneling. I have a shower but no water heater the kitchen is downstairs everyone in the building shares the same one I buy bologna by the slab. You can see the entire apartment from anywhere you stand pictures of my wife daughter scattered like buckshot. I have one of those small brown college dorm refrigerators full of beer in the corner. It keeps everything cold. Besides that all I have is a bed then a television. I sit here I watch wrestling I watch Springer I drink. God, I drink I think I'm going fucking crazy. This room is a box. You are my only friend but there is no you. You are just a cold black computer screen. Vast in your blankness I'm sorry I shouldn't be writing stuff like that.

Christmas is coming soon I'm not sure I can take it. I broke out the tiny repressed fake tree that we (blank and blank) used the first couple years of our marriage from its box I even put some colored lights on it nothing helps it just flashes red white red white I stare a long time the flashes make me sick at my stomach.

I can't sit in this apartment alone to drink on Christmas I mean it's the birthday of Jesus last week I wrote Andrea. Here's a copy of the letter:

Dear Andrea,

What's up? I bet you never thought you'd hear from me again. How is everyone? How's your Mom doing? I hope everyone is coping alright. Well, Christmas is coming soon. It's going to be tough dealing with everything I guess. Maybe you possibly your boyfriend (Jake is that his name?) would like to come up here to visit me over Christmas? Maybe Sandra (Sandra is her other sister at 13 a year younger) can come too?

I don't know though there isn't much room here. I mean there is room on the floor for about one person and that's it. I don't have a phone but my address is on the envelope (unless you tore it so bad you can't see it). Anyway write me. Let me know. Since you can't drive yet I could come get you just let me know the time.

Sincerely,

Blank.

I was sick at my stomach as soon as I wrote it.

Today I got a letter back from Andrea. She is going to come here the day of the twenty-fourth I have to have her back by noon on Christmas to open presents and eat. I don't know who else is coming. The more the merrier I guess after all they won't be staying long.

It was early in the morning when I left to get Andrea the snow was already falling. It was the first snow of an exceptionally cold year. The snow came in heaps the wide flat flakes spun sideways to the ground like falling chinese throwing stars – falling heavy like steel. All roads were already gone the pine trees the landscape lost all color even the gray of the sky lost in the confusing zig-zag pattern of the lacy flakes.

What should have been an hour drive became three hours.

I thought of the snow to pass time don't eat yellow snow my father used to tell me later I told my own daughter don't eat the snow period I should have said. My car cut its way slowly through the blank. (You blankedy blank blank!). I shivered the car's heater don't do its job I pulled up along side Andrea's house a short squat modest thing of off white. She ran out to greet me a great pink bundle in her arms. The passenger door was frozen shut so she slid over me through the door on my side.

"What's the hurry?" I asked her of course I did who else would have.

"Mom don't know I'm coming she wouldn't want me to, let's go."

I didn't know what her mother's problem would be Andrea had stayed with us many times but I'd long since given up on trying to figure that woman out.

Andrea uncrumpled the dusty pink bundle in her arms until it folded out into a blanket.

"It's cold in here," she said.

She laid the blanket out over her small legs onto her stomach bunched it up underneath her chin holding it tightly wound into her small white fist she looked like a baby being brought home newly from the hospital.

"Put on your seatbelt," I warned, "this snow is slick."

"It's cold in here," she said, "would you like some of this blanket."

"Yes, yes, yes I would."

The funeral was cold the man was having trouble with his heater it was cute in a way with one big coffin next to it one little bitty toy coffin like you would find if doll house people had coffins people came from Texas just to be there drinking coffee smoking outside saying hey how's that

business of yours going where's the little lady people in the front row crying not stopping crying my wife's family talking to me a few times stopped after I wouldn't talk move I became the only one there finally paying attention to anything but crying moving talking smoking cold in there I stopped to exist so much they stopped to exist the plants in there green so real unnatural for the time of year stank until my stomach was sick.

I find myself trying to explain things I don't want to explain actually I don't want to explain a thing my purpose in this is nothing but passing time paying attention though pay no attention to me I do not exist. There is no "I".

Andrea came alone. She said nobody else had the guts to come afraid they would get in trouble but she was sick of being around that house anyway which was oppressed (she said).

don't have much to do here said of course did who else would have said it but there is television if can get anybody to deliver get us a pizza there is some beer in the ice-box. know that you don't drink but got some cheap wine which is pretty good if you feel like trying it. haven't drank with anyone but these people in a long time what people oh these walls Mr. desk Ms. picture Ms. bed until she started laughing she said yeah she thought she would try a glass of wine.

The snow continued to fall outside like dead doves shot from the sky in flight. The snow fell until there was so much of it it became nothing.

"They say this is gonna be the worst snow in ten years."

said, "You must not even be able to remember the last one we had. How old were ya, five?"

"How old were you?"

" was sixteen and just getting my driver's license. didn't get to drive for a month after got it."

"I might be snowed in here."

"Then why'd you come? You're going to miss Christmas."

"You can't miss Christmas...no matter where your at it's still Christmas..."

" don't think it's Christmas here."

"Bah-Humbug why'd you put up a tree then?"

"It's not real."

"Can I have some more wine?"

took the bottle of Strawberry Hill from the ice box it cried a little when untwisted the gold cap little bubbles fled to escape from the new opening poured them into Andrea's white coffee mug she started to laugh when they hit her nose.

"What movie do you have?"

" got 'It's a Wonderful Life'."

"What's that about?"

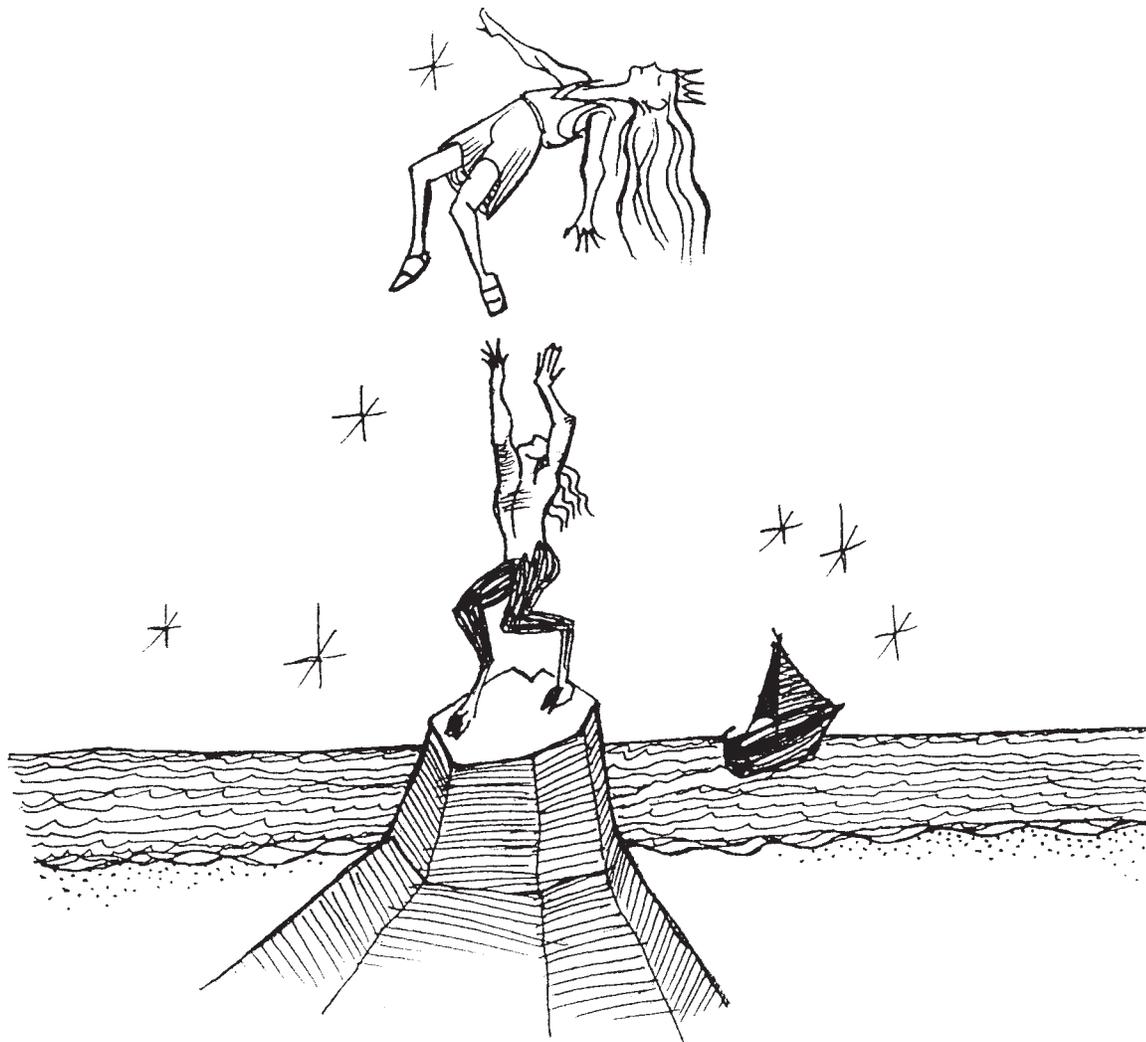
"A lot of snow George Bailey's Blues."

She laughed;das;lhjtwekj gohghlrgo Goddamnit is this thing still working? You're not supposed to know

had gone through six beers felt good looked around at all the things through force of will pulled them closer to me until they smothered me like a thick blanket. Seven beers the movie played on in black and white watched it on Andrea's face she laughed when she should laugh cried when she should cry like was watching the movie for the first time it snapped off in a fit of snow and

bees didn't turn it off but laid back on the bed watched the white ceiling spiral down onto me my stomach sick she said she said it's awful cold in here its cold on this floor pulled her up to the bed with me things started to spin again not making excuses was going to hold her like a baby she was so small rock her in my arms her arms melted into me her throat from her lungs burnt air into me a furnace everywhere on her the snow screamed in a fit of salt and pepper bees on her narrow white back slick hands clawing mapped back her clothes off naked as the day born black white pink mine on top of me slight hips fire spot burnt slowly gliding wet slush rocking melting rocking rocking a grandmother chair passed through generations heat melting snow milk skin hand trembling fingers hidden found her shapes changing wood nymph old sprite she was things to me at different times it was over I cried I cried (died died)

She laid her body over mine like an electric blanket and wiped my tears with her hair. The clock had ticked over in the night sometime before, "Merry Christmas," she said. It was the exact same kind of thing my wife would have said for me had I ever cried for her.



ARIADNE BY STEPAN CHAPMAN

The Burning Ghat

THOMAS DORSETT

We're only two blocks away
from the burning ghat,
where Hindus cremate their dead.

"Some evenings you
think there's a fire"
says my wife's sister, "then

you recall what it is.
What to do?" Here, land is
as scarce as life is

precarious. No matter
where you are, here you are
just a few steps from death,

always. Yet here is also
so much life! One is
rarely aware of the ghats...

I remember a boy
on a bicycle who
fell under a bus –
I watched the crowd gather
(no ambulance came)
– Finally, somebody took him

away in a makeshift
shroud – Then everything
returned to "normal"

– chaos. Unlike back home,
death isn't hidden here,
it's simply crowded out.



Crumbling

ERIC EVANS

crumbling
bluetile corner
ants busy feeding off
the crumbs of our crumbs.

but (i say) no more.

we work for the
crumbs and so should
they - nothing is free.

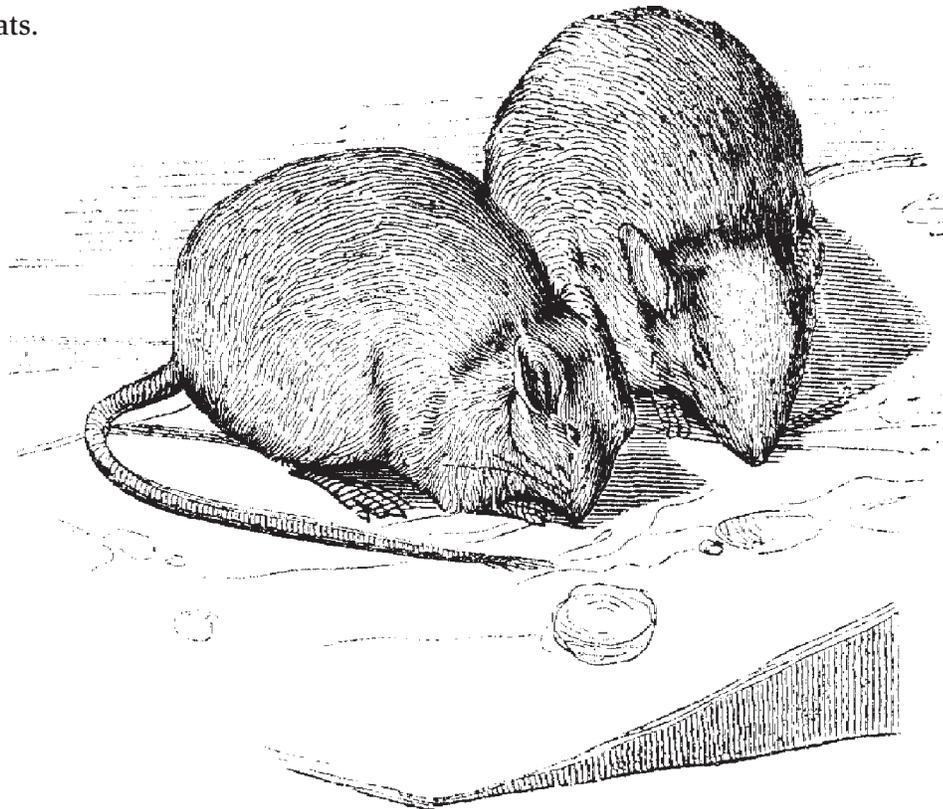
and if they won't
work, we'll get replace
ment ants who'll work

for smaller and

smaller crumbs until
there are no more ants
and the rats all come.

and (quite honestly)

i have no desire
to fuck with the rats.



Mr. Right

GARY EVERY

We were playing soccer in the park
back in the days before it was cool,
back when everyone thought soccer was for fools
and my neighbor Mr. Right approached us, saying,
“You boys should kick field goals and extra points
instead of soccer balls.”

Of course Mr. Right wanted us to play
a good old American game like football.
Mr. Right was as patriotic as apple pie
on the 4th of July
and although no one knew exactly what he did
everyone in the neighborhood
knew that Mr. Right was some sort of spy
for the CIA.

There was the Viet Nam war back in those days
and sometimes military helicopters
would land in the park after dark
and take Mr. Right away
for months at a time
but no one knew where.

“You boys should kick field goals and extra points,”
Mr. Right said again.

“It is easy money and not a lot of work.”

“Yeah but its a lot of pressure,” I replied.

“Pressure,” he laughed.

“Last year I was in Beirut
when three mad Muslims in a jeep
and armed with machine guns
tried to kidnap me.

I knew that if I was captured
that not only would I be tortured
till I talked
and then killed
but also that democracy would fall in Beirut
that very night.
Now that’s pressure.”

I recall my day in the park
kicking a soccer ball
and talking to Mr. Right
when I am a middle aged man
working in that career nowhere land
known as restaurant line cooking,
staring at a line of tickets
and an irate boss
screaming in my face about cold, soggy vegetables
and gravy splatters.
My co-worker and fellow line cook

turns to me
(greasy broiler sweat running down his cheeks)
and says, "Man I can't take the pressure anymore."
Suddenly I realize
that I should have listened to Mr. Right
and risked the wrath of a football stadium crowd,
booing as the referee signals "Wide Left"
instead of facing the pressure
of slowly working myself to death
at the wages of peasant labor debt.



RECEIVER
BY STEPAN CHAPMAN

Employee of the Month

GARY EVERY

My place of employment has an employee of the month program. It is something the Human Resources Department considers a motivational tool to keep us inspired and keep our noses against the grindstone. I don't know about you but I already feel like I have a sharp enough nose.

There is no cash reward for being chosen employee of the month. You do get to park in the special employee of the month parking spot which is adorned with little stars and hearts on the concrete block and the stenciled letters which announce employee of the month. Your name gets mentioned in the company newsletter and your picture goes up on the wall. Mostly the employee of the month gets teased a lot by all the people who were not selected for the honor. Luckily it is one of those awards which is quickly forgotten until the first of the next month when somebody else becomes the object of all that teasing.

There has never ever been a memorable employee of the month except for one and that one would be Walt. Sometimes, transients come and knock on the back door and ask if there is any work to be done so that they might earn some money to eat that day. If our boss has taken her valium or prozac that day, or whatever it is that she eats to reduce her hypertension rages she will ask them to wash windows or pick up trash in the parking lot (cleaning up the employee of the month parking spot first and foremost) for an easy ten or fifteen dollars. This was how Walt came into our lives, with a knock on the back door, a simple, unassuming entrance for a future corporate hero.

Walt had been given the task of washing the windows but as fate would have it he had timed his entrance almost perfectly. He came just as the morning shift was leaving and a little before the evening shift had arrived. The boss had some personal business to attend to and had given Walt a bucket of soapy water and some rags, and a note instructing the cafeteria cashier to pay him twenty dollars for washing the windows.

My evening shift buddy called out to me come quick to the bosses office. I did, I could tell something was underfoot. There was this old transient black man kicking back in the bosses chair with his feet propped up on the desk. He was smoking a big fat smelly cigar. The stench of that cigar was nothing compared to the odor coming off of Walt himself. It was the first time I had ever seen body odor strong enough to have its own cloud.

"My name is Walt" he said in a gravelly voice which carried the aroma of alcohol so strongly that I would have been afraid to light a match near him while he was speaking.

"I'm hungry," he announced loudly. "Bring me a rubeen sandwich. I loves rubeen sandwiches."

Me and my buddy looked at each other and grinned. We went out to the cafeteria and brought him back a rubeen sandwich. Walt grinned from ear to ear.

"Life is good," Walt said, "You want a cigar?"

I don't smoke but my buddy does.

Walt opened the bosses desk drawer and offered us each a cigar. My buddy took mine and his, saving one for later. Walt closed the desk drawer and as he shifted to eat his sandwich I noticed he had a stapler in his front pants pocket. Seemed like a dangerous place to keep a stapler to me, so I left him alone, figuring the crime had its own potential for karmic punishment. When Walt finished wolfing down the sandwich and helped himself to a second cigar, my buddy and I figured it was probably time for us to get back to work. Walt took the note the boss had given him, crossed out twenty dollars and wrote in forty. The cashier was dumb enough to give it to him.

Walt asked for a rubeen sandwich to go so my buddy gave it to him.

Walt left and never washed a single window.

On the 30th of the month, after the boss had left again on a personal errand, my buddy and I clipped the photo of some itinerant bluesman from a magazine (Leadbelly, Son House, or Blind Lemon Thomas Jefferson Airplane, I believe it was) and hung a poster which made Walt the employee of the month. It was an act which was very popular with my coworkers but made the boss furious.

This month, for some obscure reason, they made me employee of the month. I'm not sure why. As soon as they told me I went to the cafeteria and celebrated with a rubeen sandwich. I can stand the teasing of my coworkers but I leave the special parking spot empty.

Just in case Walt wants to come back.

Tchaikovsky is Drowning

TODD FOX

You expect a chaotic flailing of limbs, maybe garbled screams. But he descends into the Russian river with surgeon-like calmness as a barrage of snow flakes parachute in the dusk of Moscow's February.

You followed him, to stop him from drowning himself, the result of a bad month or two of an arranged marriage, and you realize that you're drowning also.

You look to him with hope. He might save you from facing her, from telling her that you're not into "it" any longer, that, it's *you*, not *her*, who has the problem.

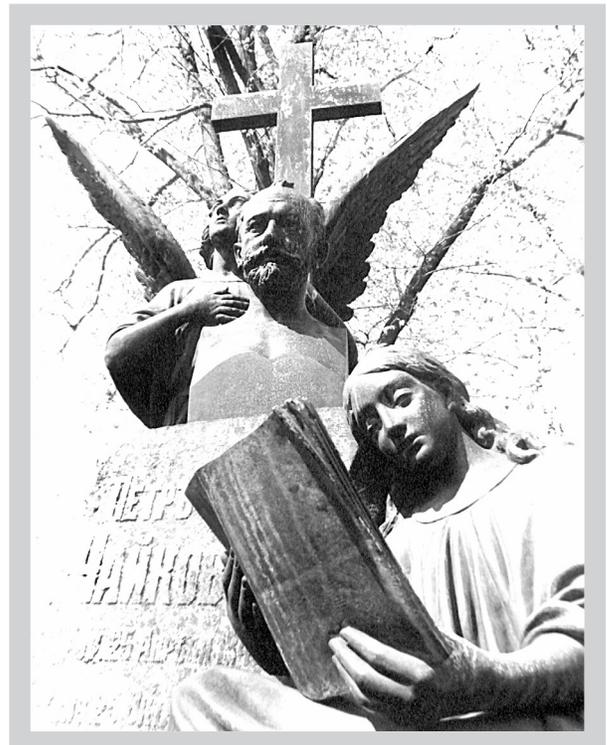
Remember overhearing the elementary school counselor, as you sat outside the office in a dull hallway painted fluorescent white? She told your parents how you'd be trouble, "It's only a matter of time."

"He throws the rubber ball *very* hard when playing dodge-ball, he seems to try and hurt the others – he aims for their heads you know. Oh yes, and, of course, fisticuffs with the older kids." She read offenses as if they were listed on a court docket. I didn't want to fight, but the sixth grade bully pushed and pushed. I searched for allies, the circle of kids – a wall suited for a firing squad, and me against it. My folks would say, "Don't take the first swing, but it's OK to fight when your back's against the wall." I threw the first punch, swinging from the hip – a hay-maker square to his nose. A one-punch victory, and me, a third grader.

The bully has most certainly committed suicide by now, all those years of guilt over the loss to a lesser boy, an underclassman. I imagine he relived this tragedy every few years. I'll bet his kids even pushed him around, maybe his wife too.

If Tchaikovsky and I had only known each other, we might have saved one another from the cold. We'd sit for hours in the heat of a small room, drinking *Stoli*, watching a fire, the blue heat cruel and magnificent against scratched glass.

He would write symphonies about resilience, about believing an elephant never forgets, and notes made of stone that could crush your toes if you let them fall from your head. I'd show him how to smash seconds with a hammer, how to pound the air into velvet with broken fists. Trying to save him, I reach out, and slip down the icy bank, disappearing into the water.



COMPOSER SLEEPS BY CHRISTOPHER M.

d'loob song of the seconds' sex

CHRISTOPHER FRANKS

sssleeeepingggg

She awakes, blurred, standing in a hallway facing a dark almost-black purple door. The door stretches all the way from the floor to the ceiling. It doesn't have a handle. As she regains more of her consciousness she realizes that the wall the door is rooted in is a plain smooth white, just like the short silk slip she is wearing.

spinnnn

The walls at opposite ends of the hallway are the same blank white. No windows. No doors. In the seconds and glances that she takes, taking in the walls, she is calm and relaxed. Almost to the point of sleep. But then behind her

spinnnn

The wall behind her is bright and alive, orange, red, blue, yellow, and green, Kandinski-like-everymen in and under a purple sunset, enjoying each other in an ancient Grecian orgy: feeling and fondling and fucking in and under each other, from one end of the wall to the other.

slippingggg

Her eyes dart from couple to couple; from threesome to foursome; from master to baiter, and with all a never ending sex act. Her heart, her head, and her eyes are spinning around the room: stirring the colors into a blurred purple peopled sunset in a white three sided sky under a dark almost-black purple door. She clenches her eyes and tightly grasps her hair, only increasing her dizziness. And then as she falls back onto and through the door...

there is no floor

Blurred again, she reawakens, but this time she is lying down. And she is lying on a bed of hands, covered in a blanket of hands: in and under a sea of hands. And warm. Now, somehow she is naked. But it is a fleeting thought that doesn't really bother her, just as the realization of the hands encompassing her sinks out of her consciousness. The warmth of the hands lull her back to sleep. She tries to hold on to the consciousness of awake. But she can not get beyond the blur. And finally she submits to a half awakened naked bliss.

Klonopin

SCOTT HOLSTAD

I fell
Getting into the shower
This morning.
The curtain came
Rumbling down on top of me
As I reached for anything
To stop the fall.

This could have happened
Because I'm clumsy,
But that's generally not the case;
Or, because I was weak
Due to the continued
Blood
Oozing from the
Arm I had been
Carving up the night
Before in a depressed frenzy,
Using a new
Serrated
14-inch carbon
Based fixed blade;
Or because I've been
Staying up until 2 or 3 AM
Working on four different
Book manuscripts; Or
Because I'm a rapid cycling
Bipolar
Who has been vacillating
Between mania and depression.

But,
I think this happened because of
My drug cocktail, and most
Specifically, because of the

Klonopin.

Klonopin is a drug with
Multiple uses, and while I'm not
On the largest dose in the world,
It does make me
Tired
Dazed
Stumble
Stagger
Stutter;

In fact,
I've heard rumors they give

It to people getting off of
Heroin. Who knows?
When I was in 3 West,
One of the lockdown
Psych wards I was
Recently in because I was
Considered a
Threat
They put certain types of
People on massive doses of
Klonopin.
It made them into
Drooling zombies.
Keith walked around,
Gaunt, staggering,
Spittle dribbling down
His mouth, complaining
About being forced to take
Klonopin.

Klonopin can come in various
Dosage sizes, and in pretty
Different shades of color,
Blue and Pink being among
My favorite. When I was in
3 West, I didn't drool. I also
Didn't hear voices, run
Screaming around
Naked and desperate.

I'm not drooling now,
But I am on Klonopin,
And it's fucking with me
Hard, even though it's
Allegedly keeping me
"Stable."

Please note
I have not killed
Myself
Or anyone else
In the last several
Months of being on it,
So it must be effective.
Still,
I fell
Getting into the shower
This morning.

Twenty-Five (an excerpt)

CHRIFTOR MAROVSK

6666666

Those fuckers came so slowly, pensive at first. Then, I couldn't get away from them. They stopped by every day, giving me tidbits and pieces. Once, one of them asked me for further text reference, and in the same breath wanted to know if it was immoral to hide things from those you love. Is it OK to swipe french fries? kiss your manager? torch pinecones? They, not fuckers. Them. Those people. Magnificent. I will condense, abbreviate, and give you the meat.

Three weeks into the semester, the trying and the prying stopped. Innuendo ceased. The classroom ritual was playing out as expected. Everybody read, discussed, and theorized. Roles and rules were enacted and enforced. The priss near the door tried to answer every question, no matter how absurd, and the three at the front, my troika, sat silent, glowing example and content, quiet and unassuming. I taught, they learned. Easy. They read, I emphasized. Simple. I tested, they passed. I was somewhat startled by the apparent intelligence of my threesome: their depth, analytical ability, and most of all, their vocabulary. Smart as they may have been, however, they seemed completely confused.

Office hours:

Rick: you know this deviance shit you're talking about? Is this real, or some sort of strange theory? Do real people fuck up like this?

What do you mean?

Well... I get it, ya know?

No. Yes. Tell me more...

I've only got two friends, OK?

Yeah...

But you're making me feel like everything's cool. But, it's not.

What do you mean?

Like the shit in class, how some people see things as normal if everyone does it, but fucked up if only certain people do it and find no pleasure in it. I don't enjoy flowers and trees and church and fresh-baked bread and clean clothes and being a part of the whole thing.

OK.

These rules and norms and mores, structures and systems and codes. It just doesn't sink in. I like heat and flame and fiery inferno and ashes and negation. What was is better than what is, and people panic when the is is in the midst of becoming the was it all gets so damn panicky in the process, but it's natural. You know? Memory can recreate everything but people need to see and touch and hold and collect and finger: reminisce. Dust stuck in fingernails is the finest form of possession. Loss. Insurance. Industries built on the permanence of value. Mr. Q, I like to burn stuff.

What do you mean?

I've never given this away, even to the closest. But you teach me deviance, am I?

What?

Deviant.

What is it that you do that is so deviant. Don't give yourself credit you don't deserve.

Burn.

Hm?

Torch, singe, inflame, surround, destroy. I heat till ash. Ash does not incinerate. Brittle ash cannot burn or disappear, only mark.

What do you burn?

You.

Me?

Might as well.

Either talk to me, tell me something, or leave. Come to class. This conversation was not.

Damn.

What was the first thing you "burned"?

A camper.

A what?

A pop up camper, top of the line for its time. The best, slept six, stove fridge, sink, everything.

You lit a camper on fire?

No. I fucking torched it. It was an accident. I am a klutzy kid. I was a klutzy kid. Best to use your disadvantages, right?

Well...

So there.

Tell me more.

Why?

You started this.

We went camping at a lake for a weekend. It was a big deal. My father was proud of their purchase, bragging about the bargain, the steal. We had never been camping before. The great outdoors. Something about missing the great outdoors. I liked the city. Hot and stinky. Sewers and lawns. Friends, and no big fucking bugs that bite. Hard. Strange monster-winged bugs that bit with wicked teeth. Hard. I was five measly years old the first night camping near the lake with eight million other adventurers. I loved the stench of the grills, spewing petroleum fluid fumes and greasy burn. Mossy lakewater dripped onto the top of my bun, my lips were coated with shiny fat from the bratwurst, it popped when my teeth punctured the natural casing, the bubbling boiling slime soaking into the bread. It was alright. Some kids at the beach were nice to me. Around the campfire, early dusk, my shins baked from the intensity of the orange, blue, red, crackling wood glow. I had to pee. The crusty wooden pee-place was a long walk away for short legs. I went, but on the way, this monster flying thing swooped out of nowhere, and the buzzing hiss of it's wings singed my ears and it scared the shit out of me and I ran and it followed me and it ripped around my little bowl-cut, five-year-old head and it raced toward my arm and landed and took flight and disappeared. I went through the door, shaking, unable to comprehend my safety. I sat down on the wooden shelf, next to a round hole that dropped things into a stinky, putrid place. I was told to poop and pee there. I calmed down enough to find my zipper and

pull out my little pee-thing. The flow began. I relaxed. Then, I got bit. A monster flying thing bit my cheek. I was stinging and angry, and I ran, bolting through the door, both hands chafed, stuck with splinters from the impact of the crusty wood when I blasted through the door. I could feel the puncture left by the bug's weapon. Swollen tissue. The tears that flooded my face ran over the wound: salt-sting. Nobody told me about that shit. Monsters with wings in the great outdoors, only trees and water and fresh air and beaches and and and campfires. I was angry, hurt. They went for a walk and I would have walked home to get away. How could I make it so this would never happen again? I stabbed a marshmallow onto the pointy end of a stick that my father had so carefully carved. I was told to toast it gently over the embers, to achieve a golden brown, while melting the inside. Just enough heat to nearly liquefy the chocolate slabbed between the graham crackers. They went for a walk and I would have walked home to get away. To be as far as possible from bugs with stinging sabers that sought out flesh. I hurt. I never wanted to see that place again. I carried the flaming ball of marshmallow on the pointy end of the stick that my father had so carefully carved. It lolled on the tip of the light brown wood, crackling and bursting like acne pores: volcanic. I made sure that it looked like an accident, untying my shoe, positioning the uprooted stump in just the right spot, rubbing dirt on my knees exactly where the impact would have been had I tripped. I towed the flaming marshmallow to the crispy canvas edge of the pop-up camper and let the greediness of the flame hoard the fresh fuel. The red blue orange abandoned my sugar-treat and gorged itself on flaps and zippers and plastic. I went running for help after I knew that the destruction was adequate enough to guarantee a trip home in the morning. That was the first thing I ever lit on fire on purpose.

A week later she came in.

I almost came in my pants.

Young though.

She said: Mr. Q.

Yes.

Well.....your class is great. I mean, I'm really learning stuff. Y'know, it's all coming together, y'know.

What?....

All the stuff.

Two Take Root

MICHAEL NEWELL

I.

A cottonwood seed armada
sails an evening Tashkent wind.

It glides and bobs past sycamore,
white oak, an assembly

of ballet-goers, two shabby
drunks, and a crippled beggar

who uses her one gnarled
hand to touch passersby.

People flick her hand away
almost absentmindedly,

the way they brush the seeds
out of their eyes and hair.

II.

In Tashkent's impoverished economic soil,
beggars sprout everywhere –

human weeds in abandoned
asphalt lots.

Every annoyed hand
which flicks the poor aside

clones a dozen more beggars
with the stunned eyes

of clubbed fish
gasping for air.

Grasping for cash, leftover scraps
of bread, discarded slices of pizza,

half-eaten chicken bones, cheap vodka,
staggering in the wake of the well-

dressed, the financially fit, the survivors
of an economic wasteland, these are

the whisperers, the ghost
voices on night's wind, dead cells

society sheds which refuse
to disappear or absolve us.

III.

The cottonwood seeds sink taproots
into Tashkent's oasis water.

The poor multiply even faster
in Tashkent's economic desert,

a twentieth century version
of the miracle of loaves and fishes,

a feast featuring the starving elderly,
child beggars, and teenage prostitutes:

Mary Magdalenes whose Christs
are fat European and American businessmen,

and the apostles and disciples are minor
corporate or government functionaries

who busily crunch between their teeth
the seeds carelessly strewn by their leaders.

Nothing can grow where scavengers
pillage every crumb, seed, and dropping.

-Uzbekistan, 1998

Voices

MICHAEL NEWELL

1.
At last our anger no longer scorches the earth;
it bums a desk here, a sofa there; we're older
and the flames are petty, contrived, vicious.

Years ago we would have torched cities, built gardens over the ashes,
fed the world, planted arbors of desire, splendid raw wild desire
for life, for the wind
in our faces, for "our"
to signify a WORLD.

Today we vent our pique through middle fingers extended to drivers
in our busy way; "our" means mine and time is a commodity, revolution
is a new hair product, and posterity
is an uncomfortable wart on our ass to be ignored
or carefully burned off
if it gets too damned bothersome.

2.
Today in class, Elton, who lives
an hour away by bus, quoted his mama:
"Down here the police don't show
until the blood has stopped its flow;
you could kill a neighborhood in the time
they take to arrive."

3.
In a barbershop, the war in the Persian Gulf
came up: "Don't tell me to read your damned pamphlet;
I don't need to read anything;
I'm an educated American."
Heads nodded all around.

4.
An old teacher to a young one: "Teach them
to read, write, and obey; the rest is garbage. We could
solve all our discipline problems with a paddle."

5.
"Oh, come on," she said, "all life is a joke.
Commercials aren't evil; they're as much fun
as a good musical comedy. Stop
being so serious; let the Japanese
worry about the whales;
let the city council
handle the homeless.

I didn't marry you to watch the evening news.
You used to be fun – the world hasn't changed – you have.
You used to laugh when someone slipped and fell;
now you want to be their social worker."

6.
Daniel, twelve years old, a wannabe cholo, writes in his journal,
"If I could meet just one person, I want it
to be my father – so I can tell him how much
I hate him for leaving us."

-Los Angeles, 1990

A Higher Power

B.Z. NIDITCH

Delilah had grown up in a non-conformist church which spoke to the living and to the dead and now has been renamed to honor the Princess, as the Church of the Goddess Diana.

Sundays were always a mystery to Delilah.

To meet Sister Vampira at the door, all gold gauze with long robes and huge earrings with her brother Grudge, a self-confessed eunuch in his ermine cloak speaking in low German, was enough to enlighten the young Delilah.

There was brother Crisp, the philatelist and archaeologist, who claimed he knew where Solomon's goldmine was (brought to Death Valley); Brother Bump, this year's medium who spoke to Princess Di, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Eleanor Roosevelt and Eleanor Powell in one afternoon; Sister Witch Hazel, a necrophiliac who grew a beard and prophesied the end of Hollywood; Sister Oatmeal who was a nuts and grains teacher of theosophy; Sister Venereal, an ex nun and preacher of the just discovered gospel of St. Nick; Brother Goldfish, an ex-porno star and now a reformed alcoholic and TV evangelist who performs sexual miracles for the newly initiated together with Deacon Hubris who initiates the initiates even before Brother Steve Goldfish gets to lay hands on them; Sister Breeder, whose title speaks for herself and has just initiated ten of her brood into the church family; Sister Charity Case who takes what she can get, having been a stripteaser and then fortune teller on the television; Vanity Case, the ex-film star of the biblical epics Sodom and Gomorrah; and now this week the newest members, Brother Nachos and Brother Navaho who were found doing something else than the missionary position on the back stairs of the church.

Delilah loved the fact that it was her grandparents who started the church until they gave it up for Cannibals Anonymous after her own parents were eaten after a Sunday of ex-communicants at their last supper.

Delilah often wondered what her position in the church was even though she was being wooed by brother Goldfish and Deacon Hubris at the same time.

She has managed all these years to have evaded the truant officer Mr. Dicks who after a session with her decided not to prosecute, especially after seeing Sister Venereal on the outside.

So without much education, Delilah had one fantasy, to be a proper follower of Princess Di and visit prisoners in America's death row especially before their execution in the gas chamber of lethal injection and to give them love and one exciting conjugal visit that they would not forget, and having done her moral duty, Delilah quickly would forget.

It involved getting in good with the wardens, no problem for our industrious Delilah, and she began to write to different prisoners from ads in the daily newspapers.

So far she had laid seven men and all had gone to their death a happy man and she too enjoyed their attention.

But now Delilah was going to visit Barker Baker, the notorious woman killer who was to be executed in two weeks.

After a session with the warden and the prison psychiatrist and though feeling a bit worn out in the treatment she was giving, she went into cell 11.

"I'm Delilah."

"Delilah from the Bible. You sure is pretty."

“I’m the woman who writes to you.”

“Oh, you... What are you here for, to help me escape today?”

“Not really, Barker. We are all prisoners in some way. But we could escape under the sleeping bag for a while.”

“What do you get out of it, girl?”

“Oh, excitement and to feel the climax of a life. It gives me a high.”

“Sure, I’ll get in there with ya, though I’m not shaved.”

“I like a big man not shaved. I like to smell a man too.”

“Okay.”

“Here are some sex toys I used with the shrink.”

In an hour Baker has escaped with some of the tools Delilah brought with her. The warden is furious but decides to claim the dismembered body of Delilah as Baker’s corpse — all in the name of order.

The Church of Diana missed their Delilah but has given their new anonymous member (the former Barker Baker) a deacon’s robe.



HOMELESS BY D. CASTLEMAN

Home Schooling

B.Z. NIDITCH

The parents kept Marvin in the crib until he was twelve. He was kept in diapers and ate only zwieback and pablum.

Only because Marvin's large head kept getting stuck in the crib did the parents, Seymour and Gigi, think of taking him out. They felt protective.

The only reason Gigi was worried was because of one neighbor, Mrs. Wise, who kept on asking about Marvin and how he was doing in school. No one else paid much mind to Mrs. Wise, but she had lived in the apartment building for thirty-five years and had a reputation for being a busybody.

Marvin suddenly shot up when he was eleven and a half. He spoke well and was well-read if innocent. Seymour was teaching him from the Great Books of the Western World, St. Augustine, St. Thomas, Pascal, Descartes, and the later Tolstoy.

Seymour was a teacher himself; his parents who worked like slaves in their haberdashery store died within a year of Marvin's birth and left them independently wealthy, though they lived modestly.

Marvin longed to get outdoors but Gigi had deep fears for the boy – dogs, and school, which she hated, having only barely graduated because of her weight problem, going from obese to skinny during her junior year, when she met Seymour in science class. He had exploded a miniature A-bomb, the teacher said. That won him to the rebellious heart of Gigi.

They had to get married after experimenting with sex and his parents grudgingly gave in. Marvin was born a premie and the couple vowed eternal protection and separation from the awful world of their growing up. Gigi's father was in the Navy and they travelled and moved fourteen times until he divorced and went to live with a young man, and the mother married a former German pilot in the Luftwaffe who used to want to play Blitz or concentration camp with her. The London Blitz involved Hans making rockets out of his own urine and throwing them out the window, and concentration camp was about his playing a commander and giving orders to her mother and her with sexual overtones.

It was rumored that Gigi's mother was thrown out the window, but the coroner's report ruled it was a simple suicide.

Gigi ran away from home many times until her Aunt Lucy brought her here to Brooklyn where she met Seymour at Erasmus High.

Marvin at twelve still wore baby clothes and bib, but had a genius mind. He had just learned toilet training and how to feed himself, but it was slow, because Gigi used to like to feed him herself, sometimes with one broccoli stick or pea at a time.

"Daddy, can we read Einstein today?"

"Of course, Marvin, after we go through your Latin and Greek."

"But dad...can't I ever go out?"

Seymour looked white, thinking of his son on the street with the noise, violence and hatred around him. Seymour wanted his son to have a home school education unpolluted from the world, to make up for his losses, having had to work in his father's store since he was nine till sixteen, when Heckleman's Haberdash became the "in" place.

"Where did you ever think of leaving us, Marvin? You know you are different from the other boys; your mother told you how she was bit by a dog, had to hide from bad people, how scary the night air is, and all the sickness outside."

Marvin is playing with a computer chess set.

“I know, but I was just thinking.”

“It’s fine to think, but you have work to do. It’s Caesar and Plato today.”

Gigi comes in from shopping.

“Ma, no more rattles. I’ve got one for every day of the year.”

“I saw that Mrs. Wise snooping around here.”

Gigi, out of breath, puts down her shopping bags and kisses Marvin.

“She asked for you, Marvin. You don’t talk to her, do you?”

“Just on the telephone.”

Seymour’s face is angry and his lip quivers, but he tries to act nonchalantly.

“Oh, when is that?”

“For years. She’s like a grandmother to me.”

Gigi’s eyes well up.

“A grandmother? She knows; I know she knows. Seymour, we’ve got to do something, and soon.”

“What can we do, Gigi?”

“Poison her, kill her; threatening won’t do her any good! It didn’t work for me growing up.”

“But honey, that won’t solve anything. Let me take care of everything.”

“You say that, Seymour, but you don’t do anything but teach...”

“That’s my life, to instill values...”

“Shut up! We’d better be careful or the State snoops will take the kid away.”

“I couldn’t live without Marvin. He’s my security blanket.”

“He’s my doll; aren’t you, Marvy?”

“Mrs. Wise sent me over steak and potatoes.”

“Since when?”

“For years, when you went out. She thinks it’s disgusting, all that pablum and sugar pops. Her grandson Mickey gave me some weights and Playboy.”

“I’ll take care of Mrs. Wise.”

“She takes care of me, Mom. Don’t you hurt her.”

“But we love you. You are our whole life. We sacrificed for you, even our happiness, just so you could have us.”

“I want Mrs. Wise! I want Mrs. Wise!”

Marvin puts on his radio and listens to short wave and punk rock.

“And who gave you that?”

“Mickey...and Mickey is coming here to take me away.”

“But he’s nothing but a playboy himself, a low life, a spoiled brat who lives off his grandmother.”

The door bell rings.

Seymour and Gigi take poison tablets from the desk.

“I tried my best for you, Marvin,” says Gigi before popping the pills; “now you go out into the world and kill ‘em.”

Marvin runs out the door to Mickey, who gives Marvin a piggyback ride over to Sheepshead Bay.

Flux

WALT PHILLIPS

be still
said the wise man
i became still
act crazy
said the wise man
do i be still or
dance weirdly? i
asked
why do you ask?
he asked
because you are
wise i
replied
no one is wise
he declared
then he was still
then he got up
and
danced weirdly
with me



Apocalyptic

MARK SENKUS

I.

I turned up the edge of the lid
and found a celery stalk brain
and I laughed so hard
that a little girl in China
pissed in her panties
and it dripped down her leg
all the way to the core
of Earth

II.

very little was said as the air
turned into the sound made
by a humming nun just after
she has eaten her morning
toast and jelly
and the air hummed and
orchestrated with delight in its
watery eyes and the nun went on
with her prayers

III.

the gift is sometimes dropped
like the vitamin tablet or the
radish behind the kitchen sink;
cup in hand, wine in cup, drunken cup
and drunken hand,
drunken gift, dropped and lost,
slipping away with a
laugh on the inside
of its intoxicating
face

IV.

THE REDDEST pinch OF APOCALYPTIC SOUND
GO GO GO, gone,
a pinching red SCREAM...
onto silence like a flower's sound...
like a last flower dying...

Eight Apartments

MARK SENKUS

the pigeons used to flock
around the roof
a few built their nests
under the crook
and then the fire
wiped out the entire complex;
eight apartments above
a sleazy dance bar,
all gone to cinders,
and most of the pigeons
disappeared
but a few came back
looking for their nests
and the homeless tenants
came back to look
at what
was left
and I stood there looking
at what would have been
my apartment
but I had moved out
two days earlier because
I couldn't come up with the rent anymore
and I drank a cold beer over at
a woman's place
where I was keeping
my duffle bag of clothes
and a small box of books
and scrounging for a meal or two
and I couldn't help but feel
lucky
for having been broke;
I felt luckier than the pigeons
and the homeless tenants
and the landlady and
the bar owner;
I wouldn't have lost much,
but my luck, at least, let me
hold onto it.

After Many a Salesman Cometh the Burglars

MARK WEBER

our neighborhood is getting hit heavy
with break-ins so we decide to have
a burglar alarm installed my wife
goes through the yellow pages and
makes appointments for the salesmen
to come over on Saturday and give us
their pitch

i ask her, "Darling, you've got these
appointments scheduled every hour on the
hour just like a doctor's office. How
are we going to get these carpetbaggers
in and out before the next one comes?"

she claims it's not going to be a problem

of course the first one is still here
chatting amiably with the wife when the
second one arrives

it's always best to meet with people
on neutral territory so you can make
your escape by merely getting up and walking

let these people in and you need a crowbar
to get them out

but with a burglar alarm they need to
see your house

she tells the first one that we have another
salesman coming to give us a quote, he says
that he'd like to stay and watch, "Just tell
the guy I'm a family friend"

so, we go through the motions with salesman #2
like a performance for salesman #1, like
a charade, a real peach
and of course the first one tells us
everything he can do for us and all the things
wrong with #2

of course

and #3 arrives, who is not a salesman but a rep
from the water company to tell us where our leak is
but #2 and #1 think he's another salesman

#2's kids are playing with our cats
everybody's talking at once
it takes two hours to get rid of them all

and wife is no help every time i think
i've got the last guy packing
just when we're about to shake hands
and say "See ya, thanks for coming"
she pops another perky question and
out comes the snake oil flowing
the second time i had my hand out
and the crowbar, and she blabbed another
question I excused myself 'cause i
really did have to take a piss but
stayed in the bathroom reading a magazine
till it sounded like blessed silence
out there

A BRAIN THE SIZE OF A WALNUT



cops have a special need
for shooting at moving targets
too much television
mad foaming dogs chasing
a Ford down the street
popping 'em off like ducks in a row

BY MARK WEBER

Market Reform

DEAN WELLS

I preceded Caroline
out of nonexistence into temporaryland by enough
that even such relatively longterm together as ours
still seems transitional, formative
instructional, not requiring the look at mortgage
planning eventual honeymoon cruise, what paint
the den, the dining room, pets being OURS
no. There is a distinction in our futures
ultimate wants dare not conflict that the sin of too
serious but
Caroline got a job having breasts
and I start to think maybe
I'd take whatever serious she laid on me
to be seeing (the big SEEing)
a marketable body, well
that can change a man, make him the wanter of clamps
visegrips, shackles and otherholds
make him the painter of future nurseries (FAR future)
a wallpaper spy appliance evaluator cosign loan
madman
Caroline got a job having breasts
and I buy roses no reason remember thirty-four
days out of the year, at least, are anniversaries
of something for her. My credit card could eat a ring
if I fed it slowly
Caroline got a job having breasts
and the couple equity I've built up may hold her
but I could never again start cold
with a body like that

A Monday Morning Crawling Ache

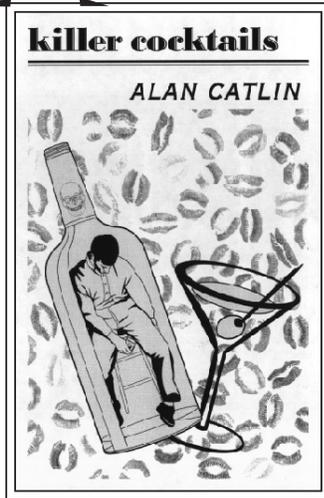
DEAN WELLS

I didn't attend her bail hearing
more use to her at work, more use to everyone at work
most of us are, that is the mood she clamps on me
and boy does she (have clamps on me)
'possession with intent to distribute' judge you
don't know the half of it. Pot makes my balls ache
and I prefer to disconnect synapses FDA approved style
but 20 billion a year drug war do you know how many
BOMBERS that is ?!
Maybe she thought she was buyin' hemp pillows
Fortunately she doesn't own anything
so they cannot confiscate it and I'm glad she didn't
take me up on that drunken offer of marriage (or so
she told me) but then
I don't own anything either
Work with the system, fight to change unjust laws
but don't look surprised when you get arrested, anyway
government oppression for her is still a court date
and a three digit fine. The fine a great deal less
than the profit on her 'hemp pillows' created by
the 20 billion dollar misuse of bomber funds
'Possession with intent to distribute'
Oh, she HAS IT alright, and by god she means to GET IT
out there
maybe some jail time would make her appreciate me more
but no....she likes girls too
can't say I blame her, in fact it's the men I don't get
'understand' I mean
I've had to quit three jobs since I moved here
because they required working with an ex-boyfriend of
hers, it's getting hard to find a job around here
or the rest of new england
or colorado, minnesota, california. I thought, screw it
I'll go work in a salmon cannery
but she's been to alaska
I didn't attend her bail hearing
gave her my credit card, went to work
and looked at everybody funny, it striking me as sad
I seemed the least miserable
even with my balls aching
for no reason at all.



ALSO AVAILABLE FROM

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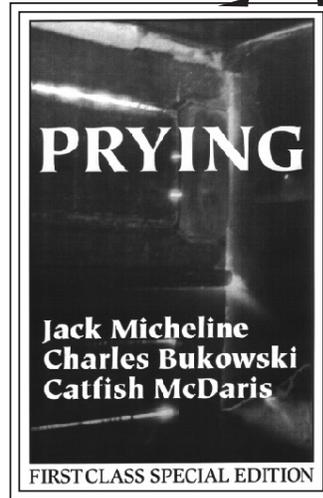
killer cocktails

ALAN CATLIN



IN THE CLEARING

ALBERT HUFFSTICKLER



PRYING

Jack Micheline
Charles Bukowski
Catfish McDaris

FIRST CLASS SPECIAL EDITION

KILLER COCKTAILS is the latest collection of poetics by the well-known Alan Catlin. Each piece in this collection of thirty is a portrayal of a character or event inspired by a particular cocktail. Persona and event become imbibables.....Fully worth the \$4ppd./offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/32pp/FS#104

IN THE CLEARING is a wandering collection which merges into a fragmented cohesion. Disturbing and fearsome, yet the most brutal aspect of this journal of poetics is the impact of frank self-examination. Albert Huffstickler is one of the best, period....\$4ppd./offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/32pp/FS#105

PRYING is a special edition of First Class featuring the words of Jack Micheline, Charles Bukowski (unpubbed), and Catfish McDaris as well as images by Sinisa Dugonic(Belgrade), Jouni Vaara- kangas(Finland), Carlos Serpas (Mexico), and Mike Tolento (USA)....\$5ppd./glossy cover/bamboo paper/28pp/FS#103.

COMING SOON: Killer chaps from A.D. WINANS "People, You Think You Know?" and ERROL MILLER "The Drifter Takes Another Look". PREORDER NOW AT \$4ppd @. They will be \$5ppd@ after publication dates.

ENJOYABLE BACK ISSUES

FIRST CLASS #4

Chock full of exceptional words and photos.

Half-legal/48pp/\$3

FIRST CLASS #5-#10

There are still a few issue of these 46-52pp/full-size/hand-bound blockbusters. They all feature sixteen to twenty + humans who created the best words that arrived in my pobox. \$5@ppd. or \$3@ with another publication to keep the printshop happy.

SPACEMAKER SPECIAL

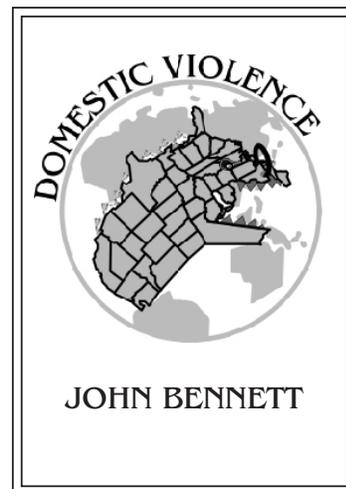
We're moving!

One (1) back issue = \$4pp

(2) = \$7ppd/(3) = \$9ppd/(4) = \$11ppd

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT

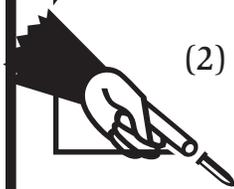
TERMS: I PREFER CASH, BUT CHECKS TO CHRISTOPHER M. ARE OK.



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

JOHN BENNETT

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE is a new collection of John Bennett's finely honed style of 'shard writing': stripped away convention beating like a pulpy red heart. This is the very sharpest cutting edge of his talent, and is a most eloquent assault on post-modern sensibilities ...\$8ppd./perfect bound/finest quality offset multi-color cover/72pp/FS#106



cattle call

First Class is very open to submissions. Especially sought after are pieces of short fiction, but poetics are, of course, accepted as well. I am now also very interested in illustrations and *some* stark photography for both cover art and internal pages. I seek the very best words and images you have available for me to read. I don't pay myself, so I certainly won't pay you, but you will receive at least one copy, maybe more.

There are a few important things to make sure that you do when you submit your work. Please, please, make every attempt to print/type your copy as dark as possible. Also, for the computer users, please do not justify or force-justify your text. Left-justification is preferred by my scanner and deleting all those extra spaces created by justified text sucks. Name and address on the first page of each piece only. Send along a SASE when appropriate. Lastly.....drop me a letter with your submission, it sure beats the hell out of a chunk of submission text and a SASE dropping out on the table without at least a brief greeting.

I make it a point to take advantage of the technology I have available to keep track of everything that comes in and leaves First Class. You can expect timely responses and notifications. I know from experience that it is disturbing not to know the status of your words.

Christopher M.

see below [COMING IN JULY] see below

Sickened by the rape of your wallet at the copyshop? Feeling locked out of the publishing loop?

Tired of the unending hassles encountered while attempting to present your words with the utmost of aesthetic appeal?

The editor of the esteemed lit-mag known as "First Class" is overjoyed to announce that Four-Sep Publications will now be able to produce chaps-for-hire under the new imprint

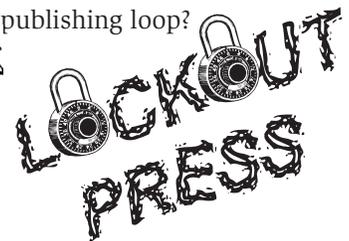
"Lockout Press". There are several options available as to paperstocks

and quantities, but all include full layout and design with the option for par-

tial distribution through Four-Sep/First Class. The foremost concern in this venture is to communicate your work with the layout and design matching the scale of your message. Professional layout software along with crisp laser output will be combined with my skill and text-crafting ability. After dropping too many paychecks at the copyshop, I want to share the ability I now have to reduce the costs associated with this wondrous obsession, and increase the quality of the finished product. Plus, I'll be able to read more of all of your fine words. Nothing is impossible to work out, and I assure you that you will reel in amazement. Drop a line to the address below, and I will work up a quote based on the info you give me. Sample rates:



presents...



Quantity	Pages	Paper	Price	Each
50	32	Bamboo	\$122.77	\$2.46
50	36	24# White	112.10	2.24
75	24	Bamboo	128.93	1.72
100	32	24# White	142.12	1.42
100	36	Bamboo	184.36	1.84

The Bamboo refers to a "Bamboo-Laid" paper that has a nice rugged texture, a dull yellow tone, and minimal show-through. 24# is firmer and more opaque, than standard 20# paper. All chaps include an offset printed cover on gloss stock. These are samples and subject to change. Some special projects may entail a greater commitment from both parties.

CONTRIBUTORS

JODY AZZOUNI – First book of poetics “The Lust for Blueprints” out soon from The Poet’s Press. Calls Brooklyn Heights, NY home.

ANSELM BROCKI – Prolific poetic appearances in the small press. “Mornings at the All-Nite” published in 1996 by Alpha Beat Press. Currently runs his own editing business. Santa Monica, CA is home.

D. CASTLEMAN – Resides in Mill Valley, California.

ALAN CATLIN – Barmaster in Schenectady, NY. An oft-published and award-winning poet with several excellent chaps. In the last year, seen in “Press”. Check out “Killer Cocktails” available from Four-Sep, a chosen Quarter Book by)ism(.

STEPAN CHAPMAN – Lives in Cottonwood, Arizona and his illustrations have appeared all over the place in the small press. He also writes short fiction, appearing in “The Baffler”, “Analog Science Fiction”, and “The Comics Journal”.

DANIEL CROCKER – Published in numerous small press publications. Recent book “People Everyday and Other Poems” out from Green Bean Press (see ‘try these’). Also puts out the exceptional “Purple” mag.

THOMAS DORSETT – Poet, translator, and pediatrician from Perry Hall, MD. Responsible for the translation of “Beyond These Shores”, a recently discovered diary and poems written by a young Jewish girl in Nazi Germany.

ERIK EVANS – Writer and musician from Buffalo/Rochester, NY. He has published four collections of his work, with a fifth on the way.

GARY EVERY – Fifth appearance in First Class, based in Oracle, Arizona. Spends his working hours with the ultra-rich, and his better time dropping words on paper.

TODD FOX – Life returns to normal in Huntington Beach, CA upon completion of the Thesis. First appearance in FC.

CHRISTOPHER FRANKS – Lives in Milwaukee, WI. Last in these pages in FC #5.

SCOTT HOLSTAD – Lives in Glendale, CA.

CHRIFTOR MAROVSK – Reclusive emigré who prefers Kurt Weill to Abba, and mentally cavorts through his borderless dreamland.

MICHAEL L. NEWELL - Currently residing in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, this is his third appearance in First Class. He offers wry insight into that place on the other side of the globe that at one time we thought would be great to blow up.

B.Z. NIDITCH–The artistic director of “The Original Theatre”, with both national and international publishing credits. Several of his plays and prose pieces have appeared in these pages.

WALT PHILLIPS – Prolific illustrator and poetic typist, now residing in American Canyon, CA.

MARK SENKUS – Survives up in the no-man’s-land tourist trap of Sault Ste. Marie, MI. This is his fifth FC showing. See ‘try these’.

MARK WEBER – Performance poet residing in Albuquerque, NM. First appearance here. Be sure to check out “February is the Crookedest Month” – see ‘try these’.

DEAN WELLS – Lives in Lyndonville, VT.

A booming thanks goes to all who have and continue to submit words on paper to First Class. I read every scrap that pries it’s way into my pobox, and enjoy and appreciate the efforts of those who have the balls to submit their words to other’s scrutiny. Please continue to pleasure me with your submissions. — Christopher M.

try these

- ANGELFLESH:** Jim Buchanan, pobox 141123, Grand Rapids, MI 49514. Please send anything—poetry, artwork, fiction, sex toys, whatever. \$4/single issue, \$10/year(3 issues plus extras).
- NERVE COWBOY:** pobox 4973, Austin, TX 78765. Send poems, short stories(up to 5pp), and b&w art w/SASE. Bias toward accessible work that depicts the absurd nature of human experience. \$4/sample.
- HEELTAP:** Richard D.Houff, 2054 Montreal Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55116. Mostly poetry, excellent production. Send \$4ppd for a sample.
- AMERICA by A.D. Winans:** Quite excellent piece of poetics, dedicated to the working men and women of America, which means all of us. Black Bear Pub., 1916 Lincoln Street, Croydon, PA 19021.
- LOVE IS A BROKEN DOWN TRUCK by Joshua Bodwell and Laura Savard:** Hand-made and -bound short piece, with a three-color silk-screened cover. A work of art. Send them \$5 and pray there are any left. Excellent production. Bodwell, pobox 4381, Portland, ME 04101.
- DREAMS AND GARBAGE AND THE ABYSS by Mark Senkus:** \$2 to 200 W. Portage #3, Sault Ste. Marie, MI 49783.
- PURPLE:** pobox 341, Park Hills, MO 63601. This is Daniel Crocker's excellent collection of essays, reviews, and criticism featuring an always awesome variety of writers. Send a few \$\$\$ for one today.
- TWO NOVELLAS, THE FIRST TIME HE SAW PARIS by Gerald Locklin/WAITING FOR MY BABY by Donna Hilbert:** 336pp/\$29.95 + \$3 s/h to: Event Horizon Press, pobox 867, Desert Hot Springs, CA 92240.
- THE TROIKA by Stepan Chapman:** 250pp/\$15 ppd. to: Ministry of Whimsy, pobox 4248, Tallahassee, FL 32315.
-)]ISM(an organization dedicated to contemporary writers and the independent presses that publish them:** The second issue was a great improvement. Basically a showcase for people like you and me. *Be sure to check out their web site: www.poetryism.com.* Info and correspondence: 1514 16th Avenue #2, Seattle, WA 98122-4196. Submissions: 8772 State Route 80, Fabius, NY 13063.
- PEOPLE EVERYDAY AND OTHER POEMS by Daniel Crocker:** I have yet to read this collection, but if you are familiar with Crocker's work, you know it will be good. There are 92 pages in this one, with a forward by Gerald Locklin. \$12 + \$1 postage to: Green Bean Press, pobox 237, Canal Street Station, New York, NY 10013.
- DOWNWARD GLIDE by Errol Miller:** This is poetics. No foolishness, pretension or classless meanderings. Miller is a poet with a talent for putting heavy weight into each word. As Vincent Bator writes of this collection: "A native son of the South, Miller mines the region's indelible history, a milieu of culture, myth and hopeless failings woven into a solid body of poetic epics." Indeed. Ninety pages, professionally presented with full color cover available for \$12 ppd. from: BGB Press, 158 King Street, Northampton, MA 01060.
- THE MOTH EATERS by John Bennett:** A collection of John Bennett's longer pieces. A brooding and exciting zone where characters develop and the full tale is told, though always with a bit of mysterious oddity teasing your brain for a time after ingesting. If you have read one of his famous "shards", imagine that as a speedy jolting assault, while in these stories, Bennett has the opportunity to tie you to a chair and spread his tales all over your face. Gorgeous words. Great production. Order yours from: Angelflesh Press, pobox 141123, Grand Rapids, MI 49514.
- ATOM MIND:** If you are into the 'beat'/booze/sex poetics, perpetrated to the finest degree, and have yet to check out this excellent perfect-bound magazine, send Mother Road (see above) \$6 as soon as possible. You will be treated to over 100 pages of killer writing and gobs of Wayne Hogan images.
- DRIVERS SIDE AIRBAG:** It is nearly impossible to be disappointed in this digest-sized quarterly. It is packed with post-mod pieces of interest to those who appreciate a challenge from the writer, a challenge to think a bit. Thoroughly entertaining and engrossing, with illustrations and comics spicing it up. \$4/issue or \$13/year from: Undulating Bedsheets Productions, pobox 25760, Los Angeles, CA 90025.
- BEAT POET:** Jack Saunders' work in progress. Issue 1 is out, with a string of continuation to follow. This man defines the word *phenom*. Drop him a line: Garage Band Books, Box 1392, Tucker, GA 30085.
- EVOLUTION:** This is a student publication of Suffolk County Community College in New York. I received an issue and was immediately overwhelmed by the obvious care and effort that went into #55. The outstanding production, which is simple, yet well-planned, including a full-cover cover on linen stock, was nearly equaled by the contents. No submission address, though I recommend this mag for it's sheer beauty.
- RATTLE:** The nice thing about this professionally produced journal is that it looks like a stuffy, crap-hound academia-burdened "review" or "collection" on the outside, yet when I cracked the cover and began to digest the poetic offerings within the pages, I was given a taste of sweet honey from the hive. As bad as this sounds: It is an excellent bundle of words to have in the shitter with you. Clean production and stand-out selections make this one more than worth it: 13440 Ventura Blvd. #200, Sherman Oaks, California 91423.

'TRY THESE' HAS BECOME MY FORUM FOR PROMOTION OF THE WORKS OF WRITERS AND PUBLISHERS WHOM I, FOR ONE REASON OR ANOTHER, HAPPEN TO APPRECIATE OR ADMIRE. I CANNOT PROMISE THAT EVERY CHAP OR BOOK OR MAGAZINE SENT MY WAY WILL BE MENTIONED HERE, BUT YOU CAN BE DAMN SURE THAT THOSE THAT ARE HAVE PLEASURED MY EYES AND BRAIN. TAKE A SHOT AND SEND YOUR BEST CREATIONS MY WAY. THEY ARE IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER.

'TRY THESE' CONTINUES ON PAGE 42

TAKING THE FIFTH by **Albert Huffstickler**: This is a cool collection, a good read, bits and pieces and fragments of Huffstickler's thoughts and poetic meandering, intermingled with illustrations. Short and sweet, though it took me a good half hour to read and absorb. Available from: Press of Circumstance, 312 E. 43rd Street #103, Austin, Texas 78751.

FUNK/WORKS by **Catfish McDaris and Mark Sonnenfeld**: This two-seater is a collection of what these two writers do best. Catfish belts out several quickies steeped in his favorite themes, with lines like "worst case of the bullhead clap I've ever seen" and "if you think carrots or bananas have no rights I'll be glad to shove one up your ass". The poetics expose several sides of McDaris: angry, obscene, thoughtful, and even.... sensitive. Sonnenfeld has an eclectic style, experimenting with minimalist verbage and jaggedly placed text. Not my favorite style, yet a pleasing challenge to read and understand. Marymark Press, 45-08 Old Millstone Drive, East Windsor, NJ 08520.

LITURGICS FOR THE HORDES AND SCADS AND MYRIADS by **Alan Cohol**: Two of the many themes Cohol writes about: writing and love/emotion, are themes that I usually find tedious. However, this book is a pure pleasure to rake the eyeballs over. His poetics smooth into the brain like creamy icing, and his insights and sentiments "we'll blind them all with beauty" make you wish he was your friend and neighbor. His words are calmly raw, their insidious creeping prongs buried in bliss. The design is exquisite, allowing images to mingle passionately with the text. Temporary Vandalism, pobox 6184, Orange, CA 92863-6184.

FEBRUARY IS THE CROOKEDEST MONTH by **Mark Weber**: Buy this chap! If not for the wonderful words of Weber, then for the phenomenal production by Clamp Down Press. Joshua Bodwell, the editor, culled these poetic gems from a vast supply, creating, as he states a "Weber reader". An awesome exploration of his common themes (booze, jazz, gardening, Janet) with beautiful hand-crafted and bound pages to ride on. An outstanding six-color screen printed cover starts it all out. \$8ppd to Clamp Down Press, pobox 7270, Cape Porpoise, ME 04014-7270.

FUEL: Issue 23/24 is an excellent collection of short fiction, beautifully laid out. Send Andy Lowry \$3: pobox 118028, Chicago, IL 60611-8028. If you are fortunate enough to make his pages, you will be in good company.

THE JACK KEROUAC UPPER PENINSULA DIARY by **T. Kilgore Splake**: A fantastic work that is so much more than a stylistic exercise. Splake "discovers" a lost segment of the life and writings of Kerouac in a backroom bookstore in Michigan's upper peninsula while poking around on a road trip. Extraordinarily well done. Angst Productions, pobox 508, Calumet, MI 49913.

THE DARKNESS STARTS UP WHERE YOU STAND by **Arthur Winfield Knight**: Addiction swirling through post-industrial working class America. Small town desperation and escapist, desperate behavior, illustrated in such a way that the characters are more than stereotypes and talk-show mimes. An excellent go-round of an oft-penned topic, written as if known fully and understood utterly. \$10ppd to pobox 2580, Petaluma, CA 94953.

SNOWBOUND#2: The first issue of this mag, which focuses on all things winter-like and snow-enamored (music/countries/sport/experience), drew me in with it's finely-honed and crystal-crisp design and professional execution. Fantastic fotos/collage/short fiction/poetics surround the theme, and it is not the least bit hokey. The second time around was just as good. Snowbound, 3023 N. Clark Street, 708, Chicago, Illinois 60657-5205.

CARDBOARD PASTRIES by **Richard Houff**: Houff evokes a sense of the Blues in his poetics, perhaps a lyrical answer to his musical endeavors. This work is a great way to spend half an hour, contemplating the cynical and satirical and damn serious methodology in Houff's approach and jazz-punky stance on life. Send \$6 to Scrooge's Ledger Press, pobox 1621, Pueblo, CO 81002.

GRAPPLING by **Susanne R. Bowers**: The poetics in this collection are strong reflections on the turgid underbelly of faulty family life and screamie memories. Happily spiteful, yet fair, Bowers pecks out the best words from her thoughts and experiences and soothes the needles down your throat with impeccably succinct expressions. This collection took third place in the 1998 Nerve Cowboy chap contest. Send \$4 to Liquid Paper Press, pobox 4973, Austin, TX 78765.

NEVER-ENDING CIGARETTES by **Scott C. Holstad**: A cool, enjoyable, 10-ton light, flighty, dead-serious, humorous, sad collection of coffee-shop pennings and curt observations of humans dancing in their events, the raw, tired, hunkered-down spectacles of their existences - or is it a singular, shared endurance test the human race faces as a unified bundle of suction-cupped tentacles? Whores seen from a distance with a microscope, and wrestling with the bent-on-chaos landcapes of USA, Holstad's language portrays the otherwise mundane with fresh and engaging word-plotting. Send \$5 to Ye Olde Font Shoppe, pobox 8328, New Haven, CT 06530.

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