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GREETINGS: *This issue balances poetics with short fiction, giving greater weight to neither. It's another good long read, with a few provocative pieces that may demand a second look. Or, that could be just me in that I've read all of these pieces four times, at least. Keep the killer submissions coming and I'll keep crankin'. As always, please enjoy! - Christopher M.*

PHOTO ON PAGE 46	<i>Joe Connor</i>
SKETCHBOOK ENTRY ON PAGE 28	<i>Albert Huffstickler</i>
COVER ART	<i>Christopher M.</i>
ILLUSTRATIONS ON PAGES 27, 33 & 39	<i>Jennifer Stanley</i>
PHOTO ON PAGE 9	<i>A.D. Winans</i>

Dipswitch

T.M. Bemis

Pol Officer Dack MacArthur sipped javabeer as he leaned against the fender of his unmarked squad-pod, daydreaming. Before him was the expanse of Riverfront Park, and beyond that, Peak City Bay, its waters accenting the transient masterpiece of a late August sunset. He liked to be here when he contemplated the past, where the view hadn't changed since his great-grandfather had been chief in the 1990's. Something about the constancy that he found pleasing – though of course not too pleasing.

He'd thought a lot lately about his ancestors, about what it must have been like to serve the Authorities in the days before Sentry. Difficult to imagine now, a world where sentiment ran amok, where longing or anger or lust turned decent, ordinary men into antisocial savages. Grandpa Aldrin had seen it firsthand during his own police career: citizens involved in every manner of mayhem, not excluding acts of actual violence directed toward one another. Fortunately, by the time his dad had joined the Force, Sentry had put an end to all that.

Accepted in 2048 by the Third United Nations Conference on Emotional Intemperance, Sentry was a device the size and shape of a spider which was implanted surgically in the medulla oblongata of all persons at the age of six. It functioned to attenuate superfluous sensation by regulating levels of peptides and steroids in the bloodstream. Whenever a stimulus threatened to disturb the optimum balance of these compounds, Sentry would counteract instantly to restore the sense of calm and well-being deemed appropriate in normal individuals.

The societal impact had been enormous. Many psychoses had vanished altogether when the emotional swings that evoked them simply ceased to occur. Illicit drug use – once a national scourge – had gone the way of the elephant after technicians taught Sentry to nullify the invigorating effects. Crime itself became a statistical nonentity as potential perpetrators discovered they lacked both the will to act and the craving for any likely return.

In this improved climate, the role of the Pol Officer had evolved significantly. The armed and wary street warrior of old had transformed into a sort of patrolling Good Samaritan, someone to lend a hand with a bag of groceries or a malfunctioning pod, or to offer a sympathetic ear when a citizen felt like voicing a concern, or perhaps a suspicion about a friend or colleague. Like his compatriots, the Officer generally enjoyed a life of predictable tranquility.

That is, until recently.

As with any progressive movement, there'd been resistance. Defenders of the status quo argued that Sentry was nothing less than a godlike contravention of the very essence of humanity, and that as such, the Authorities had no right to enforce participation. But over the first decades, after the policy had been vetted by the Supreme World Court and then implemented globally, the dissenting voices had trailed off. Visible everywhere were the benefits of an infinitely more civilized culture, a culture liberated at last from the ancient curse of unbridled passion.

And yet, while the vast majority acquiesced in this technological bounty, and grew to appreciate and even cherish Sentry, there remained a defiant fringe which the Authorities, for all their wizardry, had been unable to liquidate. So long as they were few, however, and their peculiar views wholly academic, they were of little consequence. With the emergence of the Hackers, this was no longer the case.

A year ago there had arisen – like toadstools – organized gangs of conspirators dedicated to bypassing Sentry for the sole, grotesque purpose of sensual titillation. These “Hackers,” as they came to be known, had succeeded in accomplishing what the NSA had long held impossible: they'd broken the codes.

Since people differed in physiological response, Sentry was custom crafted to each host over a twelve-week accommodation period. The unit was fine-tuned via computer-generated radio

signals which were encrypted – though clearly not well enough – to prevent unauthorized tampering. The Hackers had gotten in by replicating the hand-held transmitters used to input the data. Called a “DP” (for deprogrammer) or “dipswitch”, this instrument, coupled with a black market code book, allowed the user to restore the entire spectrum of feeling ordinarily held at bay – with predictably horrific results.

So far, Peak City had been lucky. One of the state’s minor municipalities, it hadn’t suffered the hemorrhage of Hacker-related incidents occurring in nearby New York, which had been obliged to train hundreds of Officers in archaic, 20th century crime-abatement techniques in order to deal with it. There was only a single operative gang, so far as they knew, here in the city.

And after tonight, MacArthur considered hopefully – though not too hopefully – that number would drop by one.

Because he knew where they were. Or more accurately, where Eddie Dwyer was, which amounted to the same thing. That Eddie Dwyer was involved he knew because the boy’s mother had told him so, though not in as many words.

The Dwyers were his neighbors at Crossroads Resiplex. Aware that he was a Pol Officer, Mrs. Dwyer had dropped by one evening to ask advice about her high school senior. It seemed she’d caught the youth laughing. He’d been on the vid-phone with one of his friends at the time, and she could tell there was a problem because he didn’t stop after a second or two like everyone did, but went on and on as if in the throes of some exotic illness.

“His face turned red as an apple,” she’d confided in hushed tones.

What Mrs. Dwyer wanted from MacArthur was the recommendation of a Psych Officer to make the necessary adjustment. She assumed Sentry to be malfunctioning – a conceivable, if rare occurrence. The Hackers had never entered her mind, because she hadn’t heard of them. (The Authorities judged it best to omit mention of the aberration from Qwik News.) Excitedly – though not too excitedly – MacArthur had thanked the woman for her vigilance and affirmed that he did indeed know just the fellow. The doctor was booked solid just now, but he would pull some strings to get the lad an emotogram as soon as possible.

It had taken no more than a shared ride in the magnalift to verify the boy’s symptoms. Too polite, too nervous, too everything – Eddie was obviously deregulated. Obvious, anyway, to an Officer who’d seen countless discs featuring exactly such recalcitrants. The more fortunate of these were outfitted with enhanced versions of Sentry and rehabilitated. Others – gang leaders, for instance – tended to fare less...survivably.

Hunch confirmed, MacArthur had needed only to requisition some gear and wait until the weekend, when the young man would have his excuse to stay out late at the holoflick. The reality, of course, would be far more sinister. And felonious.

At two o’clock Saturday morning the Officer’s pillowtalk module awakened him to the lilting strains of Chopin. He made his way down the deserted stairwell and paused at the exit, watching for some time before crossing the parking lot to Eddie Dwyer’s tiger-striped Affordopod. Fumbling a pack of synthepuffs to the ground, he bent to affix a TattleTail to the wheel-well. Then he followed a circuitous route back to the building and resumed his night’s rest.

The sun had winked out behind the rounded hills across the river, leaving a fading magenta swath in its wake. MacArthur drained the last of his javabeer, inverted the biofoam cup and pried up the EZ-Strip with a thumbnail. Setting it on the gray vinyloid hood, he watched the Good Bugs (DuPont’s trademark for their ravenous bacteria) go to work. The cup collapsed in on itself as if melting, and in moments was gone without a trace. He smiled: even as an adult he found the sight amusing.

The first nine, tinny-sounding notes from “Pop Goes the Weasel” floated from the pod’s open window, and reaching in, he punched up the dash-mounted monitor. A map of Peak City sprang to life, the streets bright green against a mauve background. At the lower right a pulsing blue

dot crept north on Broad Street. Eddie had finished his repast at Veggie Wedge, and was off for an evening's entertainment.

MacArthur yearned to follow at once, but he knew that would be a mistake.

This was it, the big one, the case that would make him brass like three generations of MacArthurs before him, and he wasn't about to blow the chance by lumbering in prematurely.

Or by sharing the credit. Which was why he hadn't told Chief Mugabe, or any one else at headquarters – beside Schmidt, Chang and Bertolino – about the raid.

These latter had a need to know: they were coming along.

"Enable option B," he said to the computer, and turned his better ear to listen.

The microphone function of the unit would now be energized, passing only human voices through the sieve. After a pause, the lyrics of a popular song trickled from the speaker – oddly disjointed in the absence of an accompanying tune. Eddie could be heard humming behind it in atonal imitation. MacArthur beamed: it was working flawlessly.

A silver megavan glided into the adjoining space. Stepping over to it, MacArthur conversed with the men inside. Again they reviewed the mission, and again Bertolino objected to MacArthur's solo entry into the hideout. They'd have enforcers, he reminded, who were seriously dangerous men. And besides that, the cultists were known to...to do things to people...

To strangers, MacArthur countered – guinea pigs they'd waylaid for the purpose – not to each other. For all they'd know, he'd be family. It was good practice to infiltrate first to avoid surprises; when the time came he'd call in the cavalry. Not to worry.

A crackle emerged from the squad-pod and he climbed inside to monitor new voices. In a moment he had what he needed; in the next he was rolling away from the remote reaches of the lot, a silhouetted thumbs-up displayed to his teammates.

Near the exit, a couple stepped out and he swerved to avoid them.

"Cricket!" the gentleman yelled testily – though not too testily – and MacArthur allowed him an apologetic grin. Without the noisemaker his electric vehicle made no more sound than a squirrel. Stupid: only in Police pods could the cricket be muted. Another blunder like that might be costly. Toggling it on, he swung out onto the avenue.

The safehouse the Hackers occupied was in a wooded area above the business district, very near the city line. A kilometer more and it would have been outside MacArthur's jurisdiction. Thank the Authorities, he thought, for small favors.

Just short of the place he pulled off the road onto the gravel shoulder. From his jacket he took a flat, faux-plastic box no bigger than a pocket PC, but with the numeric keypad of an antique calculator. It was a dipswitch, identical to the ones the Hackers used but for the unobtrusive button recessed into one side.

In certain situations, Officers were authorized to manipulate Sentry themselves. An Operation against the Hackers was one example. When the hostility of opponents could reach orders of magnitude above the norm, a Cop needed to level the field.

Although he'd experienced Sentry negation before in exercises, it wasn't something MacArthur looked forward to. He'd found the sudden magnification of feeling to be feral and frightening, and couldn't conceive how anyone could find such vulgar perceptive overload pleasant. Still, it was his duty and he'd go through with it. But he couldn't help being anxious – though not

**“Which gallery?
Aggression?
Passion? Euphoria?
You're new here, I
take it.”**

too anxious – as he entered the four digit code, lifted the instrument slowly to his cranium and turned Sentry... off.

Then he was anxious enough to scream out loud.

He grabbed the steering wheel and held on for dear sanity as wave after wave of undiluted emotion washed over him like a jetty in a hurricane. The effect would subside, he knew, into a sort of fevered equilibrium if he could resist the temptation to panic. Recalling his training he gritted his teeth, focused on the mental image of The Leader and recited the words to the Pledge of Obeisance. After what seemed an eternity he glanced down at the clock and saw that five minutes had elapsed. Breathing heavily he opened the glove box, removed a white knit ski mask and pulled it snugly over his head. Then he shifted into drive and nosed back onto the pavement.

A Lincoln Town Pod loomed at the end of the driveway at 236 Peak Hollow Road. Beside it a pair of nattily dressed men stood chatting, arms folded across their chests. MacArthur turned in next to the Lincoln and stopped; the men approached together, both smiling disarmingly.

Here was the highest hurdle. These were professional guards hired by the gang – probably from Manhattan – and if he didn't pass muster their receptive attitude would degenerate rapidly. His left hand remained on the wheel; his right clutched the dipswitch in the shadow of his lap.

"Can we help you with something, Sir?" asked one of the men as his eyes raked the interior of the sedan.

MacArthur swallowed hard. "I'm looking for a party at the home of a friend of mine," he said evenly.

"Costume party?" the second man asked through a tightened smile.

"Uh – yes, as a matter of fact," MacArthur replied, grinning beneath the mask. "How'd you guess?"

"And your friend's name," said the closer man, "would be...?"

"Alcibiades," said MacArthur, praying he'd repeated the unfamiliar password correctly.

The two men exchanged a look, then the taller one waved him by. Heart pounding, he continued up the darkened driveway and parked with the other vehicles.

At the front door, a man who could have torn him asunder with his bare hands greeted MacArthur jovially. "What's your pleasure, Feeler?" the giant queried and abruptly, alarmingly, the Officer's mind went blank.

"My – uh – pleasure?" he repeated, and his fingers closed on the box in his pocket.

The big man slapped a bear's paw onto his shoulder and ushered him in. "Which gallery? Aggression? Passion? Euphoria? You're new here, I take it."

MacArthur gratefully admitted that he was, and was handed off to a hovering escort every bit as diminutive as the doorman was huge. Introducing himself as "Fodor," it was this urchin – masked in white like everyone besides the ruffians at the end of the drive – who accepted the generous handful of tokens and stuffed them into the folds of his robe.

The safehouse was divided into sections catering to particular types of sensory exorbitance. Euphoria, which they were to visit first, would offer an array of mood-altering substances for ingestion. Considering how he felt already, it was incredible to MacArthur that anyone could crave such additional stimulus. It was all he could do to keep his own agitation under wraps.

At the entrance, an operative rose from a stool and plucked a battered-looking deprogrammer from a wall-mounted tray. "Need the treatment?" he asked with a yawn, and MacArthur nodded eagerly. The man squinted at the object in his hand and pushed several keys with great

deliberation before finally directing it at the officer's skull. MacArthur managed a convincing simulation of his reaction in the pod. Fodor seized his arm with a knowing cackle, and directed him into the gallery.

As the door slid closed behind, MacArthur felt an unexpected surge of fear.

Sensing it, the guide gripped his elbow tighter and assured him repeatedly that everything was alright.

The room was lighted by an intense blue stroboscopic lamp that imparted the illusion of chaotic speed to all movement. Coming from somewhere was a series of discordant tones punctuated by a resonant thumping that sounded like a chorus of lunatics played backward. The two men took seats at the brushed aluminum bar, and MacArthur looked around in guarded astonishment at his fellow patrons. Some were dancing, some singing, a few were doubled obscenely in laughter. A handful engaged in loud conversation, while others appeared to be unconscious.

All the while, Fodor recited a menu of available chemicals into his ear. The dumbstruck Officer was slow to respond; seldom had he observed such licentiousness in individuals, much less en masse as he was witnessing here. He found himself sickened by this orgy of blatantly illegal conduct, and angry – not just moderately angry but ferociously, blindingly angry – angrier than he could ever remember, and he fought hard to choke it back, not wanting to be like them, like these... criminals.

He accepted a glassful of whiskey, knowing that the pill he's swallowed earlier would block metabolism of the ethanol, and forced himself to make small talk with his shadow. Fodor joined him in imbibing the foul-tasting amber fluid, and rapidly became loquacious, confiding information about himself (he was a school teacher, of all things, and the father of three teenage girls) until the barkeep wagged a warning finger in his face. MacArthur rescued the man from further imprudence by a need to move on: he was short of time, he explained, and wanted to see everything.

Descending into the cellar for a sample of Aggression, noises wafted up that were more suggestive of a stockyard than any human activity MacArthur could envision. When they cleared the landing and the scene came into view, it was confirmed: these were indeed animals.

Nearest him, two men were on their knees grappling atop a thick mat, the Authorities only knew to what end; the odor of their exertions was pungent and revolting. To the side, under a spotlight, a second duo circled within a roped-off square, each trying to strike the other with padded, gloved fists. MacArthur recalled vaguely an antediluvian competition based on this premise, though the name of it escaped him. As he stood watching, appalled as he was he became aware of an untoward excitement that was not in the least unpleasant. A thrill – that's what he was having – his own bestial essence responding to the call of the wild.

"Are you alright, Feeler?" Fodor asked, seeing the chill go through him.

"Yes," he said, "fine, fine. But let's get out of here." Turning away, his gaze fell on a table where another pair of men sat struggling. Elbows on the surface and hands intertwined, they grunted with effort while engaged in a most peculiar-looking combat. Gradually the perpendicular forearms began to list sideways, then crashed to the tabletop as one of them achieved a mechanical advantage.

"What is this called?" MacArthur asked the guide.

"Arm warfare," he answered. "Care to try it?"

"No, I couldn't – " the Officer began, then changed his mind. "I'll challenge that one," he said, indicating the white-masked victor. The second man vacated his seat and gestured for MacArthur to take it. He sat down, locked hands with his rival and the contest commenced. Clearly the stronger, MacArthur bore down relentlessly until his foe's knuckles slammed to the wood.

Why, this game is superb, he thought, exhilarating – and then it sank in. The raw emotion was insidious, intoxicating, even to him. It would begin like this, furtively, minimally – but soon the need would escalate and spread like an unchecked plague until...

But it would be checked. Tonight. He'd see to that.

The Officer stood up. "Thank you," he said to his opponent, who winced openly as he nursed a battered hand. MacArthur leaned in close and whispered. "Run along now, Edward, your mother misses you. And keep your mouth shut if you want to avoid trouble."

"I'm O.K. It's just that – well, what I really need is a – a captive."

The young man behind the mask looked up at him agape, but said nothing. MacArthur couldn't be sure if he'd been recognized; if this compromised the raid his career would be over. The deregulation was marring his judgment – he was being foolish and illogical. "Let's see the rest," he blurted to the guide, and started up the stairs.

On the second floor a flush of trepidation quickened MacArthur's pulse. Passion was the gallery he dreaded most – because he couldn't be sure how he'd react. He'd been well prepared for physical confrontation, and had studied the effects of psychoactive drugs. But he had no practical experience whatever with his own unrestrained libido. Sex, for him, had always consisted of the regular, proceduralized...

They were inside the room now, a spacious one, very dimly lit by pinkish lumistones set at intervals in the ceiling. Real music was playing here – he recognized an arrangement of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. The place seemed empty but for these blankets on the floor – and then the sound struck him, or rather sounds – for there were many of them. Yet the moaning and panting and writhing of the couples on the carpet melded into an organic monotone that was unnerving, like the viscous slither of some hideous beast.

His eyes becoming accustomed to the gloom, he made out two sofas at the far end, both filled with masked women in a variety of sizes and shapes, all wearing diaphanous black gowns.

"Would you like one?" Fodor purred suggestively, and he discovered that he did. Want one. Any one. Desperately. For a long, blistering moment he was so gut-wrenchingly tempted...

Shoving past the guide into the hallway he threw his back against the wall, trying to collect himself. He'd seen enough. Too much; it was time to wrap it up. The four of them wouldn't have any problem with this lot. Without looking he rotated his watch-dial counterclockwise to the stop, and back again to send the signal.

Then, remembering, he looked into Fodor's upturned face which, as best as he could tell through the mask, registered real concern. "Sorry about that," he said.

"I'm O.K. It's just that – well, what I really need is a – a captive."

Fodor's eyes grew wide and he glanced reflexively down the hallway. "New comers aren't – you can't – we have no captives here," he stammered, and then MacArthur was around him and walking fast in that direction.

The corridor made a bend and terminated in a cul-de-sac framing a closed door. In front of it slouched an enforcer who had exposed the side of his face to scratch at a reddish scruff of beard. At the sight of a stranger he tugged the mask back into place and squared himself. "Can I help you with something, Feeler?" he asked, stone-faced, and in the pause before the Officer spoke there came from the room behind the faint but distinctive sound of a woman's smothered cry.

MacArthur jerked back his lapel to reveal an octagonal, opalescent shield. "Pol Officer," he announced gruffly. "Stand aside." Following close on his heels, Fodor now whirled deftly about and charged off the opposite way.

Normally-regulated citizens would have reacted to such instruction with unhesitating compliance. The guard in the soiled white mask took a somewhat different tack: he seized MacArthur by the neck with both hands and endeavored to crush his trachea with thumb pressure.

MacArthur knew he'd never break the grip, and made no attempt at it. Instead he reached to his jacket, squeezed out the dipswitch, angled it toward his attacker's head, located the recessed button with a quivering index finger and pressed it.

There was a slight report, like the snap of a pencil, and the Officer collapsed to his knees under the dead weight of his assailant. Sentry boasted another little-known use: explosive self-destruction. Those who found out generally learned the hard way, and retained the knowledge for nanoseconds at best.

Wriggling free, MacArthur leapt to his feet and slapped a hand to the access strip, expecting it to be locked. Instead, the door glided open normally, indicating that the occupants harbored no fear of interruption.

The space revealed was large enough to contain the ornate four-posted bed, but little else. Strapped to it, naked save for the band of material cinched across her mouth, was an unmasked woman. On top of her, equally unclothed but for the mask, was a dark-skinned man who skittered sideways onto the floor like a cockroach as the officer entered the room. Ignoring the cornered perpetrator, MacArthur untied the woman, threw his jacket around her and stepped aside as she bolted to freedom. Only then did he turn to confront the criminal, who was holding something in his extended right hand..

There was a muffled pop, and MacArthur fell forward onto paisley sheets.

Seconds after the summons, the team was inside the building. Schmidt shorted the access strips to each gallery in turn, converting the pleasure-palaces into holding cells. As word of the raid spread amongst the patrons, they were treated to a brand new emotional kick: abject terror.

Bounding up the steps to the second floor, Chang and Bertolino were astonished to find Pol Chief Mugabe awaiting them at the top. Perspiring and breathless, he managed to convey that MacArthur was dead, killed by the Hackers in a room down the hall. He himself had known of the plan from the start, he spluttered, but had ordered Dack to keep quiet about that because, because...

But Chang wasn't listening now so much as following the dark man's hands, and when the Chief made his move Chang beat him to the draw. Then the Officers watched disgustedly - though not too disgustedly - as bits of brain ran down the plaster like demons on their way to hell.

Idiot Savant

John Bennett

I had a dream. I had a plan. I had an investment. I had an army of miscreants queued up in a soup line in God help me I can't help myself Cleveland. I had a secret that I told over and over until no one knew what was what. I had a way with the ladies that I kept locked in the cellar. I had a problem in school.

I was neither gifted nor retarded but a blend of the two. I was an idiot savant. I could sing like a song bird and pounce like a cat. I could do back flips forever or until someone stepped in and hit me. I could stay up in a tree for three days running without food or sleep. I could hear voices in the night, calling me home for supper, but – no way, Jose. I stayed put.

Later on I tried baseball but it was simply no go. I tried the priesthood and the college and then just dropped out of sight. Drifters are not our idea of a good time they told me down south and then taught me a lesson I would never forget. I stayed north after that. North by Northwest. I did bit roles in porn flicks – the guy who delivers the flowers and gets ravaged by a blonde with mountains of breast; the blind man at the bus stop who hears his zipper come down and then feels gentle fingers encircling his cock. I tried lots of things. I even tried running for office and got elected to Congress. I've got a plaque on my wall, an honorary doctor of something, I don't know, I can't read.

I see my picture in the papers sometimes – I'm charismatic and an enigma that they can't figure out. It drives them crazy. I have been voted America's #1 role model by the psychiatric union, which means a lot of commercials – I have to say things on TV and hold up a product while looking straight into the camera. I find I can do this now and still sleep well at night. I have a wife and two children, a boy and a girl. I have a dog and a cat and a goldfish. I no longer hide out in trees or anywhere else for that matter. What's to hide? They've been talking about making me president.

An ugly rumor's going around that I'm an idiot savant. I had to look that one up, and frankly, it pissed me off. My press agent is on it. He says he'll shove it back down their throats. He says he'll show them idiot savant. He'd better, he gets paid enough.

I'm not quite sure where to take it from here. There's the backlash to contend with. The other night someone planted a banjo on the front lawn and set it on fire. I went out personally and doused the flames. Brought the thing inside, cleaned it up some, and found I could play it. My wife and kids got out of bed when they heard me. The wife put on some water for hot chocolate and coffee, and my little darlings sat at my feet in their jammies. It was a special moment.

Anyway, I think I'll accept the nomination. For the presidency, that is. What else is left after you've danced your last tango in Paris?

We Don't Need Your Stinking Badges

John Bennett

The accusations come in like a blast from a shotgun loaded with beach sand – a drumming like tiny fingers on tin; a gurgling like a barrel of maggots; a grinding like some machine that's gone bonkers; a wailing like prophets blind in the sun.

Badges, that's right I said badges, you got it buddy, we do not need them, your stinking badges, we have our own badges – badge of honor, badge of courage, badgered husbands on the dole, delicious mamas selling their hot spot for a ten spot...

Clichés! We give you clichés to pin on the donkey's rump, we give you stripped bones gleaming in the spotlight of dry-mouth interrogation, we give you the old fast shuffle. We will not stand still, not for all the tea in China, do you dig?

Mull it over for a sec. Take another gander. Slice open your think-tank and dip in a finger-um-um, good! Slurp it on down. Fertilized eggs of lock-jawed misconception, the caviar of the downtrodden masses.

Armed with clichés and pith, he marched into the board room and caused a ruckus. They got him out in a heart beat and went right on with business, gelding Chaucer with one swipe of the knife.

Meanwhile, down at the tavern, Beowulf has one drink too many and kicks back his chair. The whole place goes still as a Merrill-Lynch commercial and the bartender goes for the phone.



**Slave Boot
Polishers**
A.D. Winans

The World Serious

Alan Catlin

My priorities must be way out of proportion

Everyone says so

Not that I have much faith in everyone

Make that no faith in everyone

But when the numbers are adding up to a crowd of irregulars screaming for More Booze, Free Beer and Chicken Wings, Free This, Free That, it's just like the Sixties all over again but without the political content or commitment

I can't help but try to reduce universal issues into small, immediate areas of concentration

I can't help it – it comes with the job

maybe he thought

it was a gang
of laughs sneaking
into a bar a few
minutes before
last call displaying
a fully loaded water
pistol and demanding –
your money or
your life – with some
kind of shit eating
grin plastered on
his face as he pulled
the trigger and started
to say – fooled you good
didn't I? – before an
across the bridge of
his nose galliano
bottle body block
and a flurry of follow
up shots put his
lights out made
last call an on
the road show out
into the alley dumpster
with the garbage where
it belonged

You've been living your whole life by the lyrics in selected Bob Dylan songs but even those can't guide you forever

The dead you've left behind can follow you
and will once the alcohol supply runs low
the drugs no longer work
and all that's left is a very hard reality
the kind that can't change
or go away no matter what you do

in-country

even back in
the world his
thoughts are
rooted in-country
highway driving
in the rain
a monsoon of
memories washing
out the road markers
navigation by sense
by sight his Coupe
de Ville a hearse
carryall suit holders
body bags leaking
cleaning fluids
acidic as gasoline
everything they touch
burns even little
old ladies roadside
holding children
in their arms going
straight to hell in
a handbasket

You're cruising on automatic pilot

A DOA red raider wired to a life support machine fueled by direct to the nervous system mind altering chemicals that barely change the way you see and hear things anymore

You're immune almost from all of life's petty concerns even basic body functions elude you but that doesn't matter as long as you can still put on a good face, disconnect all of the bonds that tether you to existence and pretend all the invisible restraints are just that: invisible, meaningless, nonexistent

What's important is getting through the night, getting through the next quart, cracking the seal, baby, that's what's all about

Pushing up the bar

Setting the fucking standard all the competitors who follow you will have to beat in order to make the next level

glory

the apex of his
athletic career
was in eleventh
grade – all division
all county
all state–
full scholarships
to division one
schools assured
on the table
until his knee
ended up there
under the knife
a bump in the road
on the way to a
hall of fame career
or so his old man

sd. to anyone who
would listen as he
did his pops &
beers 'til he could
no longer speak
'til he felt those
still strong
fullback's arms
beneath his lifting
carrying him out
into all the morning's
glory

It could always be worse

At least, you're still in the game

Somewhere near the forefront even, getting by on skill and guts, howling into a topwind for
hours last before last call, your cries lost in the din of the jukebox, the roar of the crowd

You've been sucker punched by circumstances but that doesn't stop the forward momentum;
you've had your share of stitches and scars even first rate plastic surgery can't hide

As long as you're standing there's hope

Or so you think

requiem for a middleweight

slumped against
the barroom wall
her good eye
mostly swollen
shut lips puffed
out shiners
new and old
multi-colored
nostrils thick
with rolled
cotton she drinks
shots of ten high
through a straw
nine rounds into
a championship
fight set to go
15 and she was
determined to go
all the way

You've been decisioned by the judges more times than you care to think on

Been declared the unanimous winner and lost a few by technical knockouts, put down by evil
concoctions you made yourself and had no business drinking

In the end who could you blame for that but yourself?

art of spiritual warfare

her spirit guide
had been unkind
to her handing out
all kinds of
spurious bad advice

about how to conduct
oneself in a quest
for higher authority
and good living
it was almost as if
she were reading
the text backwards
or upside down
pounding double
stingers with draught
beer chasers clutching
her sacred tome to
her sunken chest
who knew what else
there was inside

It could always be worse you say to yourself but you don't really believe it
You've already seen worse but there's a post in the back of your brain reserved for worse than that
You just don't want to be around to see it when it happens
It's your own personal war of the worlds and it's coming to a bar near you

heavy metallist

he must have
thought he was
queen of the biggest
baddest heavy metal
traveling road show
in town following
some bad leads about
a sympathetic gin
mill he could find
some strong drink
hot action good dope
wild times found out
in a hurry that black
mascara dyed darker
than black shoulder
length hair & diamond
studded dog collar
necklaces wrist bracelets
and a nose ring led
to a kind of walk
on the wild side
legendary weekend
police reports are
made of

Or Luc Sante's book, Evidence

Follow the trail of blood to the end of the night, that's where home is.

Highway

Jennifer Calkins

And an highway shall be there, and a way (Isaiah 35:8)

1.

His name was Ahriman
he came in the guise of a man,
he held out his fingers and they lit fire

2.

interstate 40 between Memphis and Nashville
a curve in the road
and at mile 157 a grey car on the side
and then a thin white cross

we passed the car at 70
miles an hour and came
to this place

but even as we passed,
the car and the cross rose up in my mind
– shimmering – and stayed there

the Devil came from a hole in our history –
cousin to Baal nephew of Huwawa –
Ahriman

3 days after we passed the spot 66 cars crashed in ice and snow

3.

off interstate 81 there is a place
you can stay – “sleep on a
battlefield” Days Inn, New Market

\$42.95 a night for 2

4.

the Devil is timeless,
has been with us since the
dawn of our history
the Devil walked
with us when we first broke clay
in Africa

does He weep?

He weeps
and His tears are fire
they are ice

5.

there was no one in the
car at mile 157, not a breath – I remember:
the ice on the highway and the lights

the truckers came out at night
when the sun dipped below the
line of trees they stretched in bed

and woke themselves, they ate
breakfast in the café, chatting
on brown phones connected next to their
tables. as the moon rose they
boarded their vehicles and pulled
onto the frosty highway

angel wings and other things

those truckers drank their coffee or
popped their pills
tossing cups out the windows –
the highway glittered with styrofoam

and as they passed us our car almost stopped

*the wind that passes pushes
you down into the abyss*

6.
as we drove by the car
and then the cross I could see
a Figure in the back of my head

*what does He wear
in the dark
 why grey of course
what does He wear in the light
 white*

7.
where I am now:

outside the snow is silently
falling, flakes search
for the ground like butterflies

the Devil appeared to me one day
and I didn't see Him
I was surrounded by angels in trucks and all I could do
was honk

8.
after we passed He
stepped back towards the car, out of the
shadows He *appeared* beside the car – the highway
was silent, He was
carrying a can of gasoline

nothing sinister here, I assure you
 nothing sinister

except when He poured the gasoline across the car and lit
it from below

we didn't see the flash
being too far away towards
the dawn of the country

but some of the truckers saw it

that flashing light

and called it up and called it the *lie*

the cross did not burn, it was just far enough away
from the car
just far enough away

and so was the Man

9.

those truckers pulled into that truck stop,
The Flying J,
grabbed themselves coffee
and sat looking out at the night

they called it pyro
technics they called it
someone slipping off the road

they stopped because they knew
it could be their own pyro show
and then the smell of flesh
would be raging in around them

*in lie there is sin
in self there is Him*

from my vantage point, now, the street
is quiet, the night
is covering us
with white crystal

for an instant those truckers knew
He'd drift in and out of their space
of themselves
and then further inside

the safest place is in the light

for that instant, they knew He was their
brother, they knew about
their wings

it is 12 midnight

10.

what He rips away leaves its mark
a faint imprint

(Ahriman, are you here?)
I singed my eyelashes
and they curled back in
horror

the Devil emerges in the spaces
left by broken souls

in the back of my head

I saw Him
He walked away from the car, in His
overcoat and jeans

holding His gloves and matchbook He
turned to stare at the tire
and saw the light dancing between the trees

“no body has died here”

remember: this Man is what I saw
as I looked *back* upon the reflection
of that car
and that cross

and though I was quite taken
with the notion of this fire
and went back over it in my
head the strangest thing was
that when I went there in my mind
the Arsonist

did not exist

11.
they say the thaw is coming
and when it comes
we will be ready with skin and bare feet –
with fire and water

*oh He's an old one –
Australopithecine hominids walked in His tracks*

hiss Satanus

12.
we stayed on the battlefield one night
I was worried that it would be a room
full of ghosts
but we were warm in the bed with the night
and her haunts around us

13.
I can feel pressure on my
head the further east you go
the closer you get to the
center

the closer to the *heart*

I told myself that the story began
with another man

And the Devil wept at his usurpation by his younger brother – Adam

14.
I said to myself
this man was a human man

an old man

a man who, on the edge of death
drove out to the turn in the highway
and planted his own cross

call your other Brother on the phone
and beg Him your forgiveness
and hand Him the key to the lock on your *house*

to explain to myself why
the car and the cross sat there
quietly,
refusing to go away

I told myself a story
about the old man who sold his soul to the Devil
to his Brother
and then wanted redemption

this old man traded his soul for his life
and when he knew he stood up against the end
he looked up and saw the sky go up
in flames,
the four horsemen and all

and then that the old man drove out on a sunny morning
planted that cross
his cross
said to himself: *perhaps this is
redemption*

the Devil takes your body and burns up your soul

15.
Ahriman he
came

like a fire

*the Devil is your brother
look for Him in yourself*

if you move at the right speed
you'll cross the country
and see the perfect array
of light and shadow
you'll see the shapes form, just so

you'll see His outline

16.
there is something to be
said about those truckers

because, as you know,
they are angelic to a fault
but what is the angel

Get behind me Satan.

what is the angel
what is the battalion

in the ice of the night who reflects back at you
but yourself, your own wings lit by the fire of their headlights

if we had allowed ourselves
to stop to just
stop as those trucks pulled by,
if I had said, wait, pull over, signal to them
please bring them to me,

because that is all they ask for
this little salting of desire

if I had said, yes, I will listen to you
truckers
angels I know you
I will follow you back

perhaps the burning might never have happened?
perhaps the Devil would not have his due?
perhaps Ahriman would walk alone
in the dark down the road His cap gently cocked his hands
and the old man's soul gone
gone gone

because the angels are only intermediaries in their own way,
connected to their deity by strands they cannot see,
and forget because to remember
means to disappear

a spark in the space

they are nothing without their Brother

the battle for heaven wages itself outside of our being

17.
old man, digging in the earth

(burning)

old man driving forward and
back in his old gray car

(burning)

old man's skin like
a lightning rod
dead and the cross there awaiting him

when the heart breaks open, let it flow
let it flower

is it a god or a Devil
that holds your heart to the fire?

push
18.

Ahriman
old man

come here to me in the darkness
I cross this land I see You in my third
eye I see the burning of the car
I see the flash of the firelight on the
white cross and I know that the smell is
flesh, for all of our flesh that so burn
and burn
again, in all of the kennels of our life

old man I cannot cry for you
for something more the shape of
evil had drawn itself across you

and when I saw your car and your cross
I opened my mouth and smelled and
tasted you and knew

19.
The truckers are spirits
are ghosts of the new world
are angels are the Word
when they look too closely at who they are
they disappear like mist

I am afraid of His approach

the body in the trunk, singed and burned
and was nothing – not corporeal
it was spirit

the old man sings and burns inside himself

the truckers die young and
get their wings

jackknife – a bird in flight

20.
the old man sings
and burns,
hums and sizzles

and even with the cross
with his remorse
after he died his soul crept back into the trunk of the car
after the service after the burial

because they still thought he was good
because the closer they looked the further in He moved
into that old man, further into the corners
Ahriman crawled, waiting

old man your soul like an eel squirmed through the earth to your trunk
rising up in a dust cloud and soaking in through the gap

your soul sat there and waited for the Devil to cart
it off, your body buried your body gone

but that other piece curled in the trunk
*because grace is not born out of
regret
because grace is presence, not absence
because hell is the only place you'll ever really belong*

miles away, decades
away we smell the burning

because the Devil is timeless

because the Devil is relative to our belief in Him

the less we believe
the larger he becomes

21.
now I will tell you a story

about how I called Ahriman

about how I was obsessed by the car and the cross
and I asked for Ahriman's help,
I asked the Devil to explain it to me

I asked Him why, when I thought of Him
my mind grew blank, my mind became cold

why, when I felt Him draw near,
the truckers gathered in waves
hovered in my periphery

Ahriman, please

but when you turn to the Devil
for an answer
you have already sold your soul

22.
And so, perhaps I did
as did the old man, and when the car
burned up when his soul, like a flash of light
like a match head, burning out in seconds
burning out in the eyes of the truckers
because they knew... even as I did not
yet
at that time know, and only after I wondered
after I sought knowledge in my own way
as I succumbed to my obsession
did I recognize Him standing right before me – and I saw myself
incarnate in the old man, visible in his walk, visible in his absence

I was aged and burnt, and as my soul dissipated to hell

I asked my self *what*

Mouthing Bruce Dethlefsen

Cathryn Cofell

Blame his mom, Sally. She sold
seashells by the shore of Shell Lake.
It was there, on the cinnamon sand
as she sat in her slip sipping Schlitz
seven months showing and he still silent
and nameless. His dad, Lawrence.
Really leery, rarely Larry had a slight
lisp but even then knew something was amiss.
But she persisted, shrieked to the seething seaweed
Do you see? A pessimistic pest exists amidst us!
Fearful and not feeling full of fight,
Lawrence folded.

Thirty-three thousand people think that
Thursday is their thirtieth birthday
but not one of them understands you.
Peter Piper, your parochial principal patiently
practiced pronouncing *Bruce Dethlefsen*
period upon period, promised parents
and pals when you paraded past,
when you plucked your plumed diploma
from his pithy palms *Bruce Dethlefsen*
would pipe perfectly over the PA.
Peter Piper punted. Round and round
the rugged ritual the ragged rascal ran.

Oh, Bruce. What is it about your name
that drives me insane? This is a zither.
Tonight, I search you out in preshrunk silk shirts,
mouth you a thousand times until my cheeks
bleed buckets of bug blood, buckets of bug blood,
buckets of bug blood, yet my tongue
a beating breast against a beckoning door,
stops short, shackles you against shivering
teeth in torture for infinity, then fails.
You do understand, don't you? I would
if I could, and if I couldn't, how could I?
Fuzzy Wuzzy was such a bear,
but this fuzzy wuzzy is a bitch.

San Francisco
Me, mom, brother
It was fun, I was ten
Until we got home
Dad had watered the carpet
Yes, with a hose
Greeted me at the door
“Matt,
I left the *L.A. Times* on your bed
I want you to read the article
On the relief pitcher, Mike Marshall”
Screwball
My room was in complete order
But everything slowed down
Everything seemed bent
The illusion true

Dad had scotch taped the doors
To the bedroom
Had washed money
Had written fifty to sixty times
“All good men must come to the aid of their country”
Cut up tiny pieces of paper
Put them in our books
Glued a picture of sister on the mirror
Surreal love
Bought bags and bags of groceries
A tennis racquet for my mom
Never had she played the game in her life
He wore a Ringling Brothers T-shirt
And a cowboy hat
Smashed all mom’s dishes
Currier and Ives
Wouldn’t eat the ends of foods
“Dregs” he said
“My hands have touched them” he said

I went to sleep that night
Attended school the next day
Came home to a watered carpet
Went to sleep on the couch
Huddled myself in a comforter blanket
Shaking

Spy Versus Spy

John Grey

I'm watching a spy movie.
The cold war's over
and it's not governments
but private terrorists
that have the bomb.

So now my neighbor has the bomb.
Some family member has the bomb.
Even my lover has the bomb.

And instead of waiting for the CIA
or James Bond or whoever
to handle the situation,
now it's all so personal
it's up to me.

So anyway, that's why the guy next door
and I don't talk,
we listen for what's ticking.
And family gatherings
are hot-beds of secret information
tortured out of brother, cousin alike.
And of course, we don't make love,
but break into each other,
take a wary look around.

I never know who the enemy is anymore.
And I'm only comfortable
with people who think it's me.

A's Survival Plan

Marie Kazalia

he's got himself
a Fuji mama
for his girlfriend
we used to tease him
A. trying to max-out
all his credit cards
plying the select of us
in the hotel lobby
with restaurant meals
and open bar tabs –
while he methodically
visited his favorite tattoo salon
his forearms now covered
in multi-color Asian influenced
interlocking designs –
and the girls
at Fuji's massage parlor
always got on top –
he'd bring out the paper receipts
from his visits – laughing about
his two-session fucks
and then one day
A. strolled over to Fuji's
and the sign covered in canvas cloth
the door locked
and the banks
phoning A.
in annoyance
on the
hotel pay phone
he gave them –

W. picked up the ringing wall-phone
receiver – yeah, he told the bank woman
but he lives all the way up on the 5th
floor –

Edgar Degas: Four Dancers, 1899

Gerald Locklin

why are these dancers
outside in the woods?
and why have haystacks
been imported from monet?
not to mention, a blazing
tuscan twilight?

why are they fiddling
with their shoulder straps?
oh my god, i think that they're
about to lower their bodices,
cavort bare-breasted,
at the very least,
in the sacred groves of unspoiled nature.

a suspicion arises that we are in
the presence of an allegory.
well, piss on that – i think i've heard
that tune one time too often.

i want real women,
real tits,
and if i can't be there to join the dance,
then, please, i want them facing me.

Edouard Vuillard: woman in a striped dress

Gerald Locklin

what did the woman in the background do
to deserve a dress without stripes,
an older complexion,
hair less red,
and a plant without flowers,
seemingly un-potted and
floating like a chlorophyll jellyfish
in mid-air?

yeah, yeah, i know,
it's the composition that counts,
the counterpointing of hues and patterns,
rhomboids and spheres,

but how do you think it feels
always being the dull foil to an
animated, magnetic woman in stripes?



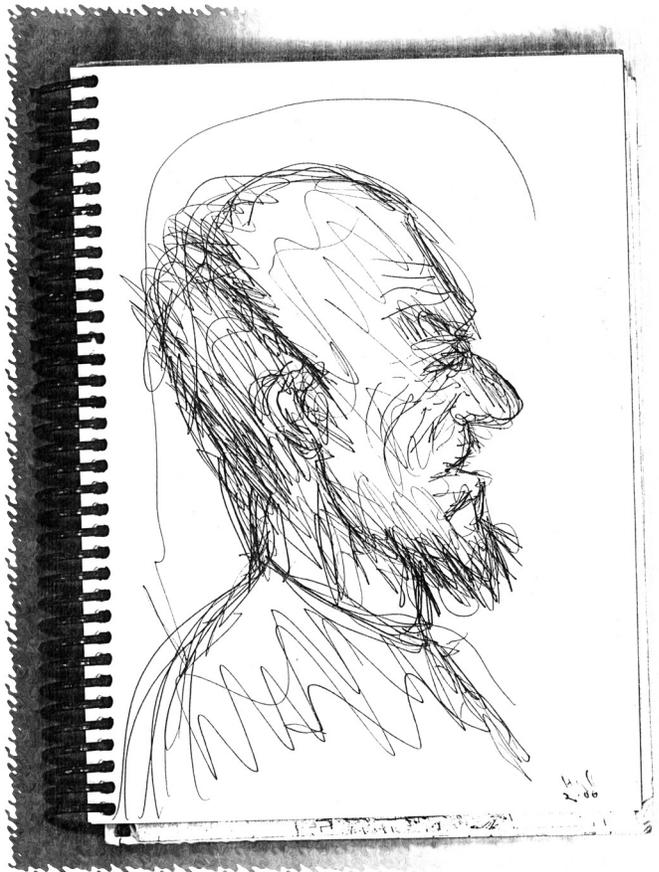
Chicken Legs
Jennifer Stanley

The Living Party

Anthony Lucero

the indian woman next door always pulls
her chair into the dark hall and sits
for hours watching the long empty wall
and i move past her often
coming and going
say hello but she doesn't answer
she has been murdered i think
by someone other than myself
or maybe myself with my hellos
they are weapons i know
and this woman is big
very big
what a waste of skin
i think a little kid could make a boat
out of her
but she probably doesn't float
for she has been murdered
maybe by the landlord
i don't know
dead in her apartment
dead in the hall
dead faces in the cars below us
i will tomorrow put her chair in the street
very early
a car will hit her
she will scream
they will scream
we will live at last
yes we will think and move
differently
it will be different
she will enjoy it.

Sketchbook
Albert Huffstickler



The Escorts

B.Z. Niditch

Michael Vanetti is about 23 but mature in his life since he had an older woman teacher when he was thirteen. His father, a Dallas oil man, threw him out of the house and told Mikey he could come back only as the prodigal son, and he lived on the streets as a hustler.

Mikey started to realize that it was his sexiness that served him best and after living with a millionaire airline executive opened up an escort service – one in L.A., the other in Manhattan.

Michael had men and women employed to be beards, or to perform services that more conventional escorts would not do.

He would test his escorts on their phone voice, their moves, postures and acting abilities.

At what he called his Monday morning “quarterback” series he would review the past week’s activities and plan his next moves.

“Eric, please sound more romantic. Les, be more romantic. Jan, persuade and dress up for each person. Lee, treat your friends with orgasms of understanding. Steve, stop ogling and judging people... I’ve been ordering new adult videos for those who need them...”

Steve pipes in, “I’m sorry, but Mikey, after that last encounter, I decided to start packing a pistol.”

“Sex under the gun may be an asset...”

Lee asks, “What if they keep wanting to go again and again after the first try?”

Michael laughs, with his boyish grin. “Give them what’s in their own heads; the desirous customer with their eccentricities are always right on the bed at this agency.”

Jan starts to laugh nervously. “But what if they are violent...”

“Have your drag family take care of them, Jan. It’s part of the job... There is no stranger to sex here... Just don’t let them feel you are insecure. If they want a jock construction worker, the boy next door or a girl scout or Catholic schoolgirl or nurse, we will supply all of your outfits. If someone wants you to be their slave or master, to nibble on the nipple or likes sex torture or thinks sex is a torture, let them. Everyone has their assignments. Go ‘F’ their brains out. I have to go.”

Mikey walks pridefully to the water cooler. A former client, Violet, holding some violets, tells him she is on an anti-sex mission for God, and shoots him in the foot, then proceeds to go into the office and wounds several others, until she sees Steve, who has a gun himself. Then she calms down, and offers to have sex with him on the bloody floor.

Chances Are

B.Z. Niditch

Every day after watching the soaps, Tina Rocker goes to her yearbook and looks at Chance's picture. She has been in love with him since junior high in Teaneck, New Jersey when an illness caused her to leave school because of a 1950's epidemic which gave her curvature of the spine, after being put in an iron lung.

Chance Mechanic has married a couple of times though it's only 20 years later now, early in '71. He has no children and has done odd jobs, as he calls it.

One night Tina felt braver than a schoolgirl and located Chance's phone number and called him.

"You may not remember me..."

Out of fright and shame she hangs up the phone.

One of her girlfriends, Doreen, invited Tina to the shrine because she believed Tina's back could be healed.

As Tina with her crutch and in her white communion dress took some holy water, she asked the Virgin to heal her and that she be allowed to marry Chance.

"I heard her talk to me, Doreen."

"Who, dear?"

"The Virgin."

"Yes?"

"She told me I was going to get my Chance."

Afterwards, Tina started calling Chance every day she could, but it was a woman who always answered.

"Damn her, Doreen. One day I told her about Chance and she started to laugh at me and said Chance was not interested. Then she changed her phone number."

Tina starting sending Chance mass cards, crucifixes, Fatima prophecies, and they always came back to her unopened.

One day she wrote to Chance about her secret infatuation and a letter came back in a Woman's hand.

"Oh, that ratty woman. I've got a mind to kill her..."

It became an obsession for Tina to drive by Chance's house, and finally with a tiny shotgun she purchased she went there and shot the woman. Tina became frightened and went up to her confessor but decided she couldn't speak.

The newspapers reported that Charlotte Mechanic, the former Chance Mechanic, now an exotic dancer, was murdered.

Tina went to her yearbook and ripped out Chance's picture.

Ergo Sum

Ben Passikoff

I make it up as I go along:
the scenery, the steeples,
the burying;
origami of stars;
the eeny-meeny numbering,
pi and pious;
and all that blood.

I die when necessary
on opposed wood,
2 by 4's in perpendicular;
in merry cinders on the ghat,
or Buddha bones remembering
the many nouns of doom.

My fingers whisper
rosaries of atoms:
intertwist
of manic quanta –
now you see it, now you don't.

I pen in red
the protocols of protoplasm,
shimmering cockroach complexes
arranged in shapes of prayer.
Evolution, dissolution, etcetera –
I connect the dots as necessary.

Wandering into alleged
eternity I pity the silvering
scientists who wait the black
unblooming branches of Hades
amid the falling fahrenheit.

They aimed their telescopes at me but missed.

Somalia, Africa

A desert, waves of sand. Mild winds made a rain of the baking sand, which came at you from the ground up, pricking your skin, leaving dots of red burns. Soldiers stuffed cotton in their ears and nostrils. Sand got in everything; eyes, food, equipment. It kept helicopters grounded, machine gun triggers stuck, powdered eggs gritty, sand mites and cameramen everywhere. Even the soldiers had camcorders. Whatever it was they were doing here, it didn't much feel like war, or a peace keeping mission, or whatever it was supposed to be. It sort of had the feeling of a home movie.

One night, he dreamt he was blind and walking through a sandstorm, sand filling his mouth and going down his throat. He struggled to breathe, began to choke, which was the point when he woke up, his heart beating fast, looking around the darkened tent, the taste of sand in his mouth. He had only been asleep for twenty minutes and was dying of thirst.

You couldn't drink enough water. You walked around bloated. You were always thirsty. Always pissing.

In an early letter home, he wrote how beautiful the desert sky was at dusk, how he was friendly with a group of Somalian kids that were teaching him their language. In a way, to actually see the starving people made him appreciate the life he had back home, in the United States. He felt he was maturing, and that he had been doing a lot of thinking, and he regretted many things. But he didn't include that. Or make mention of the sand, or the scorpions, or the feeling of being homesick, or the legless boy who was pulled around on a piece of cardboard by his mother. He was trying to be a man and men didn't complain about such things to their mothers.

One day, he watched a bunch of Somalian kids literally fight over a pack of M&Ms. They did not want to share.

It started to wear on him, the starvation and the heat and the sand and the smell of garbage decomposing and burning, the sporadic gunfire. He stopped looking in his shoes for scorpions. Whatever happened, happened.

Poker helped. He played a lot of poker. The stakes got higher the longer they were there; from packs of Kool Aid to cigarettes to money to favors. Soldiers got a kick when a fellow soldier lost his shirt. He wasn't a very good bluffer, but he just liked taking part in the games. A good game of poker could take your mind off anything, each and every soldier talking about something, anything, agreeing for the sake of agreeing and disagreeing for the sake of talking, laughing for its own sake.

There were good times. For instance, one day as the sun was setting, a group of soldiers got a football game together and played two hand touch until it was dark. Then they lit flares and stuck them in the ground and played a little longer. They did that for a couple of days, but then the football got stolen. Something was always being stolen. You couldn't trust the Somalians, and you couldn't trust other soldiers. The next day, they found another platoon with a football that resembled the one they had lost. A fight almost broke out between two soldiers who were looking to start something, but they had been pulled apart and told to calm down. Instead, the platoons played a game, winner take ball. They planted machine guns in the ground to mark the endzones. The game started in the fashion of two hand touch, but after about ten minutes they changed to playing tackle. He got in the game after another soldier pulled his hamstring. He caught a pass and got hit hard, got sand in his mouth. He called the soldier an asshole.

"You say something?" the soldier said.

He walked back to the huddle.

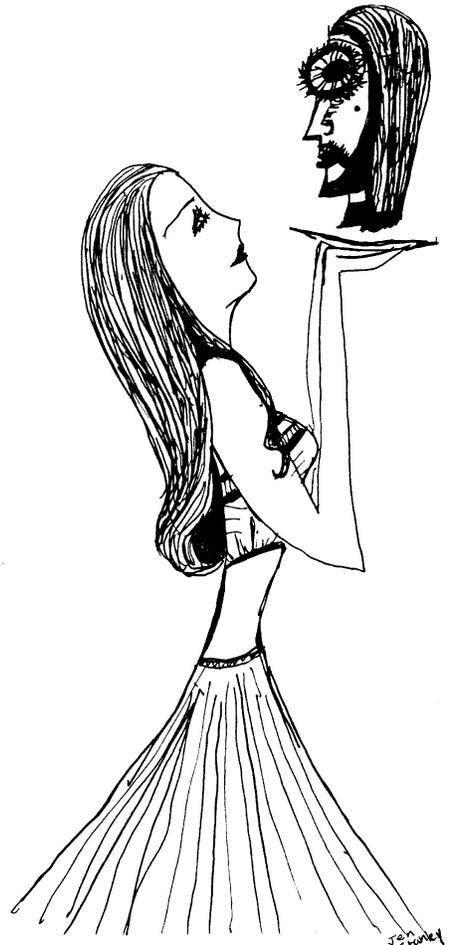
“You say something?” The soldier got in his face. “You afraid to say something now, little man? I am the meanest motherfucker you will ever know. You don’t want to get in the way of my shit. I will tear your head off and shit down your neck.” He beat on his chest like a gorilla.

The soldiers were always trying to act crazy or deranged in some way, looking for a reputation, a nickname. He tried to ignore him.

Soldiers sat on a tank and watched, laughing, egging the violence on. A group of Somalians became spectators, knowing this wasn’t the kind of game they were wanted in. So they chose sides, clapping their hands when someone scored. Somalian women poured water from plastic jugs over the bodies of the soldiers to get the sand out of their cuts and replenish their fluids. Shouting kids tackled one another. Heatstroke caused players to quit, but the game continued. Tired players were replaced by soldiers wanting to get some aggression out. Nobody kept score. Jets screamed across the sky. Fights broke out, but the game kept going. A soldier suffered a compound fracture, but the game did not end there, even though it was a blowout. It wasn’t about the score anymore. One soldier lost some teeth. A few got bloody noses.

Just before sunset, a wind blew wisps of sand into the air. A Somalian woman, tucking her baby’s face under her breast, began singing. The others followed. Then gathered their children, and within minutes a sandstorm came and the soldiers headed back to camp. The women lead, their children singing along.

Salomé
Jennifer Stanley



Its legs came down out of its chin, so that there was no torso, and all its innards and organs were enclosed in a breathing, transparent sac that hung from the side of its face.

The moment that it slid out of his wife, Grumm wanted to drown the thing in the water tub like he did kittens, or bury it in the turnip patch where it might be good fertilizer or at least fodder for the goats.

“No,” Drella said, staring down at the orange eyes of her newborn, and remembering last All Hallows’ Eve when Grumm had been away on one of his drunk-nights, how she dreamed a satyr with savage lust in his loins had taken her on the hearth rug, while shapeless twists of hellfire sprang at them from the chimney. When she woke, she could smell the ancient brimstone lingering about the room.

No, this weren’t no regular being. It were sent for a purpose.

When Drella finally found the bairn’s sex and his umbilical cord entwined together in the little niche where the stumps met the chin, she cut the cord and freed herself. Within his sac she could see his heart and liver and intestines moving rhythmically to the flow of blood, and she pinned a diaper around the opening at the bottom. Then she wrapped the newborn in a blanket she had stitched out of goatskin while she was pregnant.

“What’s his name, then?” Grumm asked.

“Royal,” Drella replied, not knowing where it came from, only that it exploded from behind her eyes and flew out of her mouth.

From Royal’s ears extended probing claw-arms and the first time Drella suckled him, she could feel his pincers digging into her flesh as he held on.

He grew rapidly and in a month’s time he was climbing up the side of the bed and attaching himself to her breast with his claw-arms. His big, sharp teeth clamped on her nipple and she held back her scream. The next morning she put him at the nanny’s teat, and closed her ears to the strangled cries of the goat.

As Royal’s claw-arms grew longer he discovered his sex and pulled at himself, but the smell of the goat’s piss excited him anew, and after he drank of her he flayed her open with a pincer and drove himself in.

His hunger was savage. Drella killed five or six hens every evening for his meal, while she and Grumm had to be satisfied to eat boiled potatoes and turnips smeared in chicken fat. When at last Grumm discovered the nanny’s bones piled by the fence, with not a speck of flesh left on them, he said to Drella, “He et the she-goat. Hide and all. He be only six month, and from his head together with his legs and feet, he almost big as me. He talks already, and his hair grown long over his sac of innards. He gettin bigger, and eatin more. His teeth chomp like a machine. Soon there weren’t be no food left, no hens for eggs, and now no nanny for milk or for the billy to fuck and make more kids. What do we, wife?”

Drella frowned, not wanting to think about it, but kept stitching Royal’s new burlap leggings and cloak, and bigger goatskin shoes for his ever-growing feet.

His gait was funny. Some nights they’d all three laugh as he scabbled along a few steps, then paused to toss his head of thick orange hair so that his sac of innards could catch up with him.

Royal knew he was amusing his parents, and laughed with them, a choppy sound of ragged sputters. He liked performing. “Pa, look. Watch, Ma.” He waddled across the floor toward Grumm, and then rolled himself over, giggling, shaking his feet in the air above him.

After he made them laugh, he knelt near Drella and pulled her dress aside to get at the shrunken breast. "Milk, Ma!" he screeched, grinding his immense teeth into her nipple.

"I'm dry, Royal," she grimaced, pushing at him to stop.

His pincers dug at her, trying to squeeze milk from the teat.

"Milk, Ma! Hungry, Ma!"

"There's none, I'm dry!" Drella winced as much from the pain of seeing him hungry as from his twisting her breast. She tried to shift his focus. "Look, Royal. New leggings. Your wooly ones are too small already – let's take them off and we'll try these on, would we?"

That night Drella lay awake staring at the ceiling, wishing it would reveal to her why Royal had been sent to them. Surely not to suffer such hunger as he had, or to make their small farm poorer still, without hen's eggs or goat's milk to sell in the dusty corners of town?

And that same night, in his room below the eaves of their little house, Royal ate his wooly leggings.

He started only with soft things – pillows from the couch, cloths Drella used for washing and drying dishes, and the hearth rug. "He be gonna die from eatin such stuff," Grumm told Drella.

But her breasts were healing from the bites and cuts of Royal's teeth, and she bided her thoughts. One day he ate her apron, and while he slept his nap she secretly moved his hair away from his sac of innards, to see if there were any signs of the change in nourishment. The blood flowed, the heart beat smoothly, and the intestines churned at the same rate as always.

"There be no harm to him from it all," Drella said, as she readied their meager basket of eggs, potatoes and turnips to peddle in town.

Then they returned, Royal had eaten two fence posts. He saw them walking in from the road and ran to them excitedly. "Look, Ma, look, Pa – I et some. It be good." He held up another piece of fence and ran his pincers across the wood, slivering it in three.

"It'll stab splinters inside him," Grumm muttered, getting his shovel to plant more potatoes.

But Drella watched as Royal threw his head back, fed a chunk of wood into the deep hollow of his jaws, then merrily did his roll-over with his feet shaking in the air.

"He do love to cut up," Grumm said. "Wisht instead he'd spade holes for the taytoes. No money in actin up."

"That's it!" Drella cried, her breath coming in heavy gasps from the excitement she felt quivering inside of her. "That's it – he be sent to make us rich: He be for actin in front of people, swallowin cloth and wood things."

Grumm frowned, cleaning his teeth with his thumbnail. "How do we be rich on that?"

"Don't you see?" Drella stood his shovel aside and looked in close at him. "Remember every summer, when we seen the travelin carnival over at the fairgrounds, and there's this man swallowed the pointy end of swords, and another who swallowed fire? They be paid money to do it. Royal could be paid for eatin!" She seized Grumm's hands and danced him about, looking wildly behind her at their yard, where her daily wash flapped in the breeze. She said, "he could eat the fence, the nanny shed, your saw horses, my clothes pole, my petticoats, your breeches – we be rich, husband, we be rich!"

The next morning she put him at the nanny's teat, and closed her ears to the strangled cries of the goat.

But Grumm broke free and picked up his shovel. "You be daft, wife."

Drella left him to his digging and went inside to count their peddling money. She decided to ask about in town next week when the carnival people were due to return, and wondered how much money Royal would bring in each time they came. She already saw in her mind the beautiful royal blue cloak and the velveteen leggings she'd make for his performance, and had already created his stage name: The Royal Wonder.

She learned the traveling carnival folk would arrive in two months, and she sewed in her every spare moment, trimming the leggings with a lace fringe, and covering old wooden buttons with the velveteen material she had traded from a cloth peddler in town. She made Royal new goatskin boots, stain-dyed with the juice of blueberries to match his cloak.

**"Be that for to eat?"
He reached his
pincers across her
sewing basket.**

Grumm said nothing, but planted, hoed, fed the chickens and gathered eggs. Drella killed only one chicken for Royal's supper each night, for he was eating other things constantly all day long and getting bigger still – now his innard sac hung down over his shoulder. He ate most of the fence, all the new branches on the linden tree, half the couch, part of the kitchen table, most of Drella's dish cloths and two of her cook pots. Behind the empty nanny shed, where Drella knew he went to pull off, he found a pile of rocks and sucked down all the small ones.

In the evenings, he watched her sew. He had no way of sitting, but knelt, and leaned himself against her chair. "What that be for, Ma?" he asked as she gathered the lace into little tucks for trimming. "Be that for to eat?" He reached his pincers across her sewing basket.

"No, Royal, not to eat," Drella said, pushing his claws away. "This be your new outfit for performing in the carnival, when it comes."

He said nothing, but looked over to Grumm, who sat with his calloused hands around his tankard. "You ask your Ma to tell it," Grumm said. "I would no part in it."

Drella peered over at her husband angrily. "No, but I'll wager when the money comes pouring in, you'll get yourself plenty of pints, and a horse and wagon to take you to the tavern for em."

"What be a horse, Ma?" asked Royal.

"Once we have money, I'll buy you some books to learn it with. Even how to spell, maybe."

"Spell," muttered Grumm. "A dreamin woman you are, wife."

"Well, he be from dreamin, not from you, husband."

"You dreamed him?"

Drella nodded, threading her needle. "One before this past All Hallows' Eve, I dreamed of a drunken satyr who came down the chimney in a ball of smoke, and he had hellfire and brimstone in his clapper, and he fucked me grand."

Grumm shook his head sadly. "Daft," he said, and emptied his tankard. "I be to bed. When you be ready again for fire and brimstone from the same drunk satyr, wake me."

"What be brimstone, Ma?" Royal asked, taking her mind off the puzzle she wanted to ask Grumm. That night, Royal ate the black iron cookstove.

She dressed him in his new outfit and combed his long orange hair over his innard sac. Into an old bed quilt she gathered three small rocks, four slats of wood from the fence, a gingham tablecloth and one of Grumm's shovels. She tied the ends together to drag the bundle behind

her. "Come on, Royal," she said. "We're going to walk the road, so be careful you don't step in the horse cakes."

Grumm followed silently with his basket full of turnips and potatoes. When they neared the fairgrounds, Grumm turned toward town to peddle his produce, while Drella and Royal walked closer to the noise and bustle as workmen hammered stakes and shouted across to each other, putting up gaily-colored tents. Royal became excited and leapt into the air, then did several roll-overs.

"No, Royal, no!" Drella screamed, running after him and tucking his innard sac back beneath his hair. "Not yet, you'll get your new clothes all mucky out here on the ground. You must would wait to be on the platform, inside."

She noticed some of the workmen staring at Royal, so she called, "He be a performer. Where would be the manager?"

One of the laborers pointed to a plain gray tent, and Drella saw that as she and Royal made their way past them, the workmen hung back, watching the strange boy with growing repulsion on their faces.

"Come along, Royal," she said, stepping inside the gray tent. The man sitting at a table looked up. "How do, sir, you be in charge of hirin the acts, sir?"

He nodded, staring at Royal's orange eyes and large, projecting jaw.

Drella began untying her quilted bundle. "This be the Royal Wonder, sir. He can swallow wood, and rocks, and metal things, which we would to show you now."

The man shook his head. "We don't have a freak sideshow. Only acrobats and knife throwers and fire-eaters -"

"But that be it," Drella interrupted. "He be to eat the wood and rocks and metal on the stage."

The man kept shaking his head. "I'm sorry. We don't hire freaks."

"He be no freak," Drella said angrily. "He be my son, who is the Royal Wonder. Here, Royal, show the man." She handed him a fence slat.

Happily Royal chomped off a piece and chewed, his jaws grinding quickly, specks of saliva flying from his lips. Then he swallowed. "More, Ma. It be good." He dug into her bundle and thrust a rock into his mouth, his innard sac falling away from the shelter of his hair.

The man winced. "Lord, preserve us. Woman, make him stop. Take him out."

"But it be his act," Drella wailed, beginning to realize that the man saw it wasn't an act at all, it was Royal's own true self. "He be to work for little money -" she began, and then knew it was hopeless, for the face was creased with loathing and horror. "Come on, Royal," she said, putting her shoulders back and taking hold of his pincer. "We be to home now." And she marched herself and her son through the workmen's stares with her eyes fastened straight ahead.

For hours she sat motionless in the cold kitchen in the dark, and when Grumm came home she finally stirred to light the lantern and to peel the potatoes.

"Well?" Grumm asked, tossing the pouch of peddling money on the last bit of table that was wedged against the wall.

She shook her head no, and busied herself making a fire in the hearth beneath the iron kettle of water.

"He not be to act in the carnival, then," Grumm said, putting his hands to warm at the fire. "We would no more money, then, would we?" He slid down against the wall and sat on the floor, reaching to the heat.

Drella poured the potatoes into the cauldron and sat down by him. "He be thought a freak. If he not be sent to us for this purpose, to make us rich, what for he be sent?"

Grumm was silent, staring at the fire, and Drella heard the flames snapping. "Husband, what besieged me on that All Hallows' Eve when I dreamed him?"

She heard him sigh. "T'were me, wife. I came home to find you sleeping on the rug by the fire, your dress slid up over your tiddle. You nary woked up when I bunged in, nor after."

"I half-woked," Drella said. "But I kept a-dreamin at the same time. But I didn't dream the brimstone, it were real."

"Were the sulfa from a match. I lit me pipe."

"Ah," Drella said, nodding. "I thought he were a satyr-devil child. What for he be sent like that, so odd, if he be ourn?"

Grumm breathed quietly for a little while, then finally answered. "Maybe he weren't sent to us, wife. Maybe we were sent to him," he sighed. "No one else would have him. We were his last hope."

After they ate their potatoes, the fire went out, and they wrapped themselves around each other for warmth while they listened to Royal beneath the eaves, gnawing away at the roof.

Within weeks, he ate the rest of the fence, the nanny shed, the billy goat, the trees, bushes, roots, rocks, Drella's daily wash, and nothing filled him up. He was eating the house, little by little, and the hens he had devoured raw. He was nearly seven feet tall, and his innard sac was so heavy now, he had to walk with his head tilted to the side as it dragged along the ground.

"No more roll-overs can he now do," Grumm said, as from the window they watched the boy lumbering about the yard, shoving dirt, stones, weeds, anything he could find, into his mouth.

"I wanted to buy him a present for his first birthday, it would to be soon," Drella said. "A play ball, maybe. He ain't never had no toy."

"He'd only eat it," Grumm told her.

"I know. There be naught peddlin money to buy it, too." Sadly she looked over at Grumm, who was growing haggard from no more potatoes and turnips, and beneath her dress she felt herself wasting away. "What do we, husband?"

Grumm shrugged. He looked up where the sky showed through the partly open roof. "There be no more hammer and wood to patch the house. There be no more shovel to plant taytoes. There be no more turnips to dig outta the ground. We could beg on the corners, but t'would never be enough."

Drella accepted that. She thought back about how it had been when they had chickens and goats and plenty of milk and eggs and vegetables. She remembered her cookstove and her hearth rug and all the lovely furniture that was eaten now. Her eyes went from the barren wasteland that was now their farm to the little bit of shelter that had been their home, and she knew. She knew that Grumm had been right, she should have let him drown it, but when the orange eyes had looked at her, she never had a choice.

Eventually they lay down together with their faces toward the sky, and listened to the wood beams snapping off and crackling inside Royal's jaws.

They lay there with their hands entwined, and when the house was all gone, fireplace bricks and wood floorboards and walls and stone steps, Royal knelt down by their bodies and pleaded, "Milk, Ma! Hungry, Ma!"

He saw his parents didn't move, or speak, or breathe. He pulled Drella's dress aside and squeezed her breast. "Ma! Hungry!" He pinched a bit of flesh off and tasted it, and after he had eaten his

parents' bodies and their clothes, he trudged back and forth across the barren yard, searching, digging, his hunger driving him for days, until he was finally exhausted.

"Ma!" he howled into the empty night. "Pa? Hungry, Ma!"

And in the morning, with his pincer he slit his innard sac, and began to eat.



Balanced
Jennifer Stanley

Jennifer Stanley

Vignette, Palm Sunday

John Vacca

It was the best dress
she had, and it was soiled,
and she was tense for fear
someone would hurry her out
or else she feared
for life itself.

They were colored jelly beans
a week before Easter
in a plastic cone decorated
with orange and green ribbons,
a carrot as cornucopia.

It was a fast food restaurant
in the land of plenty,
and I bought the package
in between bites of hamburger
for a dollar (and a half).

On she went to another table,
rehearsed and sweet,
turned down by old folks who
did not know what
to make of her
or her mother
(or someone)
waiting outside, watching.

Scattered Moments From a Schizophrenic

James Michael Ward

He watches the window from the 13th floor. The city can be seen in all its glory. Helicopters and planes make weird lights in the midnight sky, as if they were UFOs. He sings David Bowie's *Star Man* to the empty room. The door to the hospital room opens. A beautiful thin girl enters the room. She has sneaked in.

"I brought you an orange," she says opening her palm to reveal the fruit. He peels it and tears it in half, giving it back to her.

They eat the fruit savagely with juice pouring on their lips. They kiss. A nurse opens the door. "Carrie, your not suppose to be in this room, now out you go, 10:30, lights out."

He turns down the sheets and gets into bed without removing his clothes. It is dark. He sleeps restlessly from the medication. He wakes in the night to see Carrie over his bed. She removes her heavy jersey and slides into his bed. They make love with the view of the city in their eyes. When finished she leaves in silence like she came. He turns on the light and goes to the desk. He writes:

She comes
in the night
and stands
over my sleeping bed
she glows
like the ghost
of Joan of Arc
she removes
her shirt
and lets me
taste her breast
like the orange
she gave me earlier
she is Grace Kelly
in the mad waltz
of a terminal hotel
for the insane
the city lights
show me her body
and I cum in her
like a witch doctor
casting out the demons
of the Haldol tablets –
He turns out the lights and goes to sleep.

Scene 2

He enters the stripbar. He takes a seat on the couch. The waitress brings him a draught. He drinks it. A beautiful woman with jet black hair sits next to him, offering him a dance. She removes her bra and sits on his lap. The music plays. She kisses his lips.

He finds her tongue. He kisses her breast. Then they go back to kissing as she pumps her legs and thighs on his erection. The music ends and she asks him if he wants another dance. He says, "Hell yes."

They continue to make out as she takes her hand and unzips his fly. She puts her hand in his pants and strokes his penis off. She takes out her hand and licks the cum off her fingers.

He pays her forty dollars then kisses her goodbye. He leaves the bar and walks home to a little

house a few miles from the club. He enters the house and gets a beer from the fridge. He opens up a notebook and writes a poem about the experience.

She kissed my lips
and I tasted her tongue
I felt her breast
with my trembling hands
and withered lips
She felt my cock
like it was a question
of love
I answered her
with an eruption of ecstasy
She tasted it
with a kiss farewell –
He finishes the poem and he finishes his beer.

Scene 3

He is strapped to the hospital bed, by his feet and one arm. One arm is free to see when he will try to masturbate. A nurse is at the desk, she is sexy, he sings Leonard Cohen's *Masters* song.

The nurse is amused. The two orderlies in the white coats are not amused. They scream at him and tell him he will get a beating if he keeps this up. He sings anyway. He announces himself the Jesus Christ of today as he is being crucified by the mental health system of today. They keep him tied for three hours when he begs them to let him go. "You show us you can behave right, and we will let you go."

He grabs his cock and screams: "Is this what you wanted to see?"

They quickly fasten his free arm and declare: "All it took was three hours for you to show your true colors."

He is caught up in the sexual psychosis of religion. As are his captors. They leave him on the leather strapped cross for four more hours until the ambulance arrives to take him to a mad house.

"Your limousine has arrived, Jesus."

They strap him to a stretcher and wheel him to the truck.

He rides in the back of the stretcher singing "Were you there when they crucified my Lord." He is released from shackles in the hospital, where he paces out the square corridors, until a large black attendant forces him into a room and pulls down his pants with an erection, only to be saved by a pretty nurse who tells the queer that she will administer the shot. She does. He passes out to write a poem in the morning.

Crucified in the wasteland
for chasing holy sex
Let us pray
for the immaculate cunt
for seven hours
I hung on their rack
to be cataloged
as a masturbating Messiah
and shipped to Detroit asylum
to find shit on the floor
the food dosed with saltpeter
and other drugs
queer orderlies
masochist doctors

and all the other
lost souls
screaming for a cigarette –

Scene 4

He sits at the kitchen table. A black coffee, an ice water and a smoke. He sits sipping from the hot cup. He hears a knock on the door. He walks to the living room and opens the door.

The mail man hands him a package. He shuts the door and rips at the package.

He pulls out a chapbook of his poetry. He looks through the pages and screams *Yahoo*. He reads aloud the first poem:

Restless Night

restless night
surrender the morning
in a haze of nicotine
viewing the city
clusters of people
beating the pavement
in a frantic rhythm
coinciding with the towers
etched on the polluted backdrop
immune to the screams
wails from hell
return to the child
to discover the truth of humanity
ugly as it might be.
a tear forms in his eye, he goes back to the kitchen to read his
own poems and drinks the coffee.

Scene 5

He sits in the coffee house art gallery and drinks espresso. The owner of the gallery walks up and sits with him. She is a beautiful woman. He opens up his old suitcase and hands her the oil paintings. They are abstract expressionist. She looks through the collection. She says she likes the paintings and will give him a show.

She leaves and comes back with a contract. He signs it and is happy. She takes five pieces for hanging and framing. He puts the rest of the art back in his bag and sips his espresso having an image of him and her making love in the nude. He finishes his drink and walks outside and lights a smoke. As he walks down the art street section of the city the poem plays in his head.

my case
is full of abstract art
of nude figures
of crucifixes
of demons
my first show
is in a month
and all I can think about
is fucking the owner
of the gallery
at least I have
my next painting –
of two nude figures
one woman
one man
splattered with the color
of blue gray and red

I wonder if she will hang it
for the next show
not knowing it is her
that radiates the beauty
on the canvas –

He walks to the bus stop and smokes and waits with his large bag.
The bus pulls up and he leaves the streets.

Scene 6

He has gone completely insane. He paces the basement frantic and mumbling to the voices in his head. He smashes chairs on the ground. He grabs at his neck in pain, he grabs at his crotch in pain.

He climbs the stairs to the house. His parents urge him to take his medication. He thinks they have a gun and are planning to do him in. He strikes his father with his fist. He strikes again and again. Mother tries to pull him away. He strikes her. He runs to the basement in tears. Father phones the police and explains, “My son is a schizophrenic off his medication. He attacked us.”

The police come and he goes away in cuffs. In the police car the poem reads:

invisible needles
in my neck
razors to my crotch
like some Voodoo
witch working on me
night and day
chemicals in my head
making me
see demons
where there are none
Mother and Father
I am sorry
I attacked you
for the gun
that was not there
I love you
I'm sorry
for the mental rage
I was not me
when I brought blood
to a peaceful home –

Scene 7

He is in an old house in the broken section of the city. He drinks a beer and sits at the bar in the basement. Two other friends are with him. They lay the cocaine out on a mirror.

They snort the white powder. They snort the white powder til it is gone. Then he leaves the house. Walking stoned. The poem reads in his head.

From the mental asylum
to the streets
just as prolixin
cures the demons
I find a new habit
of doing cocaine
I am a junky lunatic
I am chasing dope
with a rolled up bill
I need to get clean

I have to leave
the city
to the dealers
and whores
I need to get clean
the only thing
I can do
is confess to my parents
that I need help
I wonder if they will
take me in
while I kick
the addiction
to a loathsome self –

Scene 8

He is dressed nice at the kitchen table. Drinking coffee and smoking, his parents, sisters and cousins are in the house. They laugh, and enjoy what family is all about. He writes at the kitchen table. This is what he writes:

Coming Home

mother cuts
Irish soda bread
I am home
for thanksgiving
I am clean
I am sober
I've lived the life
of a Hollywood junky
scoring drugs
and coming down
now four months
have gone by
and I haven't
been stoned
on coke yet
I drink my coffee
I butter the bread
it tastes like sanity
I am trying
to simplify my life
I'm trying to stay sober
I sip my coffee
and wonder
how unusual it was
to be without a family –

Molly Buxton

Greg Watson

At the Bad Habit Cafe, where St. Paul crumbles into calcium and dust, we sip foam from black lacquered cups larger than soup bowls, an oversized book of ancient catacombs stretched between us. Passing cars casting net-like shadows across the walls, a death-rattle blues rising through the steam, the spit, clang and clatter of espresso machines. With one slender hand she extracts a short filterless cigarette from a narrow silver case. A flask without a spout. Her hair a tiger's nest of red, the deep crimson of royal velour or clotted blood, a faint halo of dye along her hairline, her leather jacket worn and greenish at creases and elbows.

It is winter, the city frozen in body and in time. Old men tottering along in layers of blankets, army drab, hunker down like wayfaring turtles. They are the oldest soldiers in the oldest war, fighting for nothing nobler than survival. I don't want to leave this place. I know it will be meaningless, I know I will blend in too easily. I want to stay here. I want to stay here and watch this woman smoke.

Jump
Joe Connor



contributors

T.M. BEMIS *A chemist who devotes his spare time in Mohegan Lake, NY to hitting tennis balls to his son, banging his fist on the table, reading, drinking, smoking and quiet melancholy.*

JENNIFER CALKINS *Lives and writes long, thought-provoking poetics in Ithaca, NY.*

ALAN CATLIN *Barmaster in Schenectady, NY. An oft-published and award-winning poet with several excellent chaps. Published in "Press" and many others. His "Killer Cocktails", is available from Four-Sep, as well as it's fine successor "Hair of the Dog That Bit Me".*

JOE CONNOR *New to Brooklyn, NY, he's worked numerous jobs but found his home in the bookstore biz and hasn't had a TV for 10 years.*

CATHRYN COFELL *Published and anthologized frequently, resides in Appleton, WI.*

JOHN GREY *An Australian living in New England, earning a living in computers while writing stuff in his spare time.*

ALBERT HUFFSTICKLER *Widely published phenom in the small press. His words and artwork have often appeared in these pages. Lives, breathes and eats in Austin, TX. Check out his Four-Sep chap.*

MARIE KAZALIA *Numerous books and chaps forthcoming and under her belt, she lives in San Francisco, has traveled to Japan, India and Hong Kong, and is originally from Toledo, OH.*

GERALD LOCKLIN *Long time, far-reaching presence, with an abundance of publishing credits. Teaches at CSU-Long Beach and has lectured on Hemingway in the land of cigars: Cuba. His books are available on popular bookstore websites.*

ANTHONY LUCERO *Lives in Los Angeles, with poetics appearing in Chiron Review and others.*

MATTHEW DE MOTT *His poetics reflect true stories from his life in South Pasadena, CA.*

B.Z. NIDITCH *The artistic director of "The Original Theatre" with international publishing credits. Several of his plays and prose have appeared here.*

BEN PASSIKOFF *Lives and writes in Flushing, NY.*

MAX RUBACK *Young, hungry and everything's about the fiction for this Floridian.*

VERA SEARLES *Currently working on a fantasy novel, she lives in St. Petersburg, FL.*

JENNIFER STANLEY *Illustrations flow from the pen in the Yooper land of Marquette, MI.*

JOHN VACCA *Lives and writes in Platteville, WI.*

JAMES MICHAEL WARD *Several chaps out from Alpha Beat, lives in Southgate, MI.*

GREG WATSON *Previously featured in First Class, check out his chap from Lockout Press.*

A.D. WINANS *Born in San Francisco and the author of nearly 20 books of poetics. His resounding voice out of the Bay area can be read in People, You Think You Know? from Four-Sep Publications and elsewhere.*

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.

killer cocktails

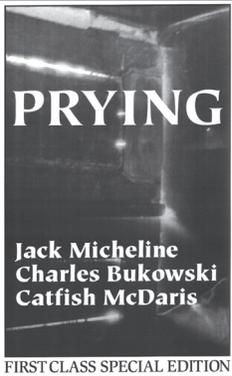
ALAN CATLIN



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 \$5ppd./offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/32pp/FS#104

REVIEWS

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.



FIRST CLASS SPECIAL EDITION

IN THE CLEARING



ALBERT HUFFSTICKLER

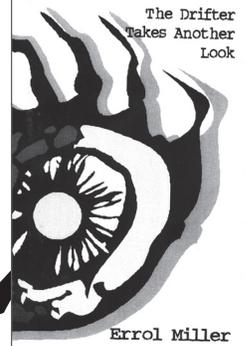
IN THE CLEARING is a wandering collection which merges into a fragmented cohesion. Disturbing and fearsome, yet the most brutal aspect of this journal of poetics is the impact of frank self-examination. Albert Huffstickler is one of the best, period....\$5ppd./offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/32pp/FS#105

REVIEWS

PEOPLE, YOU THINK YOU KNOW? is short fiction and poetics from one of the long-standing greats in the small press, A.D. Winans. This is Winans at his best with short fiction and gritty poetics. Get into Winans' head! Also features fotos of San Fran folks, through the eyes of A.D. / \$5ppd/offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/28pp/FS#107



The Drifter Takes Another Look



Errol Miller

THE DRIFTER TAKES ANOTHER LOOK... These are pieces from the late 80s, Miller's mind ripe, the pen in his hand, once again, after an 8-year dormancy. This is the sweetest, most well preserved fruit plucked from the sealed cellar of the mind of Errol Miller, one of the more prolific writers on the scene today/\$6ppd/offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/50pp/FS#108

REVIEWS



JOHN BENNETT

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE is a sweet 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...\$9ppd./perfect bound/finest quality offset multi-color cover/72pp/FS#106

REVIEWS

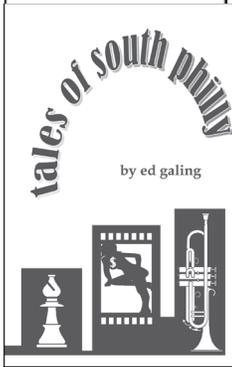
also available from FOUR-SEP PUBLICATIONS

Single issues of First Class are \$6ppd.

The best thing to do is subscribe, since every issue is at least 44pp of killer words. Subscriptions bring FC right to your door for a full year (3 issues - Feb/June/Oct) for a mere \$15. Give it a try.

TERMS: CASH IS GREENER, BUT CHECKS TO CHRISTOPHER M. ARE OK.

TALES OF SOUTH PHILLY chronicles the sights, sounds, smells and action on the streets and in the homes of a long-since-gone South Philly. Hard living turning out the best people, leaving behind a few and struggling in the crossroads of a city and growing up / \$5ppd/offset slick cover/24# paper/28pp/FS#114



That Bit Me

by Alan Catlin

HAIR OF THE DOG THAT BIT ME is what you get the morning after indulging in Alan Catlin's earlier release, Killer Cocktails. Once again, plenty of deadly drink recipes that are indicative of the accompanying poetics. Another killer collection that belongs with the pleasure inducing prequel in everyone's bar (or bathroom). Just \$5ppd./high-end slick cover/linen paper/32pp/FS#109

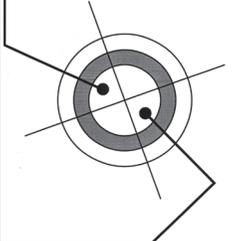
REVIEWS

MILES OF HIGHWAYS AND OPEN ROADS features 42 poetic slices of the exotic loaf from which the well-travelled Newell nibbles. Never presumptuous and hyper observant, whether it's a glimpse of Jordan or Oregon, these poetics are tight and full of precise, earnest imagery from the perspective of full cultural immersion. \$6ppd./high-end matte cover/24# paper/50pp/FS#110

Miles of Highways and Open Roads

poems by Michael L. Newell

Collision Course

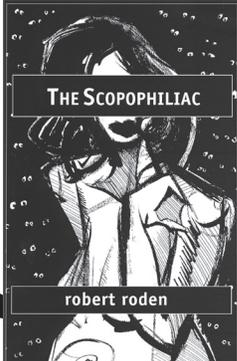
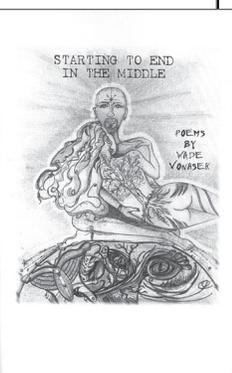


poems by Michael L. Newell

COLLISION COURSE draws from the years Newell spent in Uzbekistan in the late '90s. These 37 observations reveal the confusion, anticipation, dirt, and beauty of the land and people wedged in the deep seat of the Slavic/Asian crossroads of ex-USSR. Invigorating. You may reconsider your own situation and stance. Your passport just \$6ppd./high-end matte cover/linen paper/46pp/FS#111.

REVIEWS

STARTING TO END IN THE MIDDLE pulls together 30 pieces of Vonasek's best poetics revealing somber introspection, consistent speculation, and often a glimmer of hope. Featuring artwork by Lori Dale. Vonasek was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Just \$5ppd./high-end slick cover/linen paper/32pp/FC#113



THE SCOPOPHILLIAC is the latest release from one of the Long Beach area's strongest voices. This collection stirs Lee Mallory to state that 'one could mount these poems, or like a greedy voyeur, just watch and listen'. Gerald Locklin observes that he 'blends the ineffable of the Symbolists and the cacophonies of Southern California rock into a music of his own'. Just \$5ppd./ high-end slick cover/linen paper/24pp/FC#112

REVIEWS

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.

Speaking of technology » » » stay up to date at : www.execpc.com/~chrifor (don't forget the tilde)
www.execpc.com/~chrifor

Christopher M.

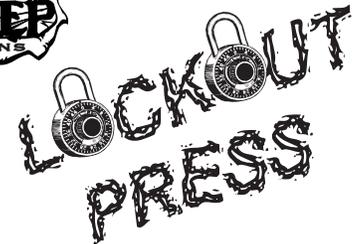
see below » [NOW IN EFFECT] « see below

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?



presents...



The editor of the 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 partial 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 experience, 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 me a line and I will work up a quote based on the info you give me.

Sample rates:

Quantity	Pages	Paper	Price	Each
50	32	Royal Linen	\$156.13	\$3.12
50	36	24# White	143.98	2.88
75	24	Royal Linen	166.28	2.22
100	32	24# White	183.50	1.84
100	36	Royal Linen	227.53	2.28

The Ivory Linen refers to a paper that has a nice rugged texture, a dull yellow/ivory 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.

Recent Lockout Press Releases

GOOD READS FROM SMALL PRESS REGULARS...

Translucent View by Michael Keshigian

24pp/Ivory Linen/\$4ppd to author: 14 Apollo Road, Londnberry, NH 03053

Innocent Stranger by A Simple Man

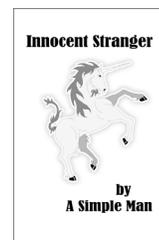
32pp/Ivory Linen/\$4ppd to author: 2710 Woodlawn Avenue, Tifton, GA 31794

Annmarie Revisions by Greg Watson

26pp/Ivory Linen/\$5ppd to author: 608 Lincoln Avenue #100, St. Paul, MN 55102

Open Door Open Wall by Greg Watson

24pp/24# White/\$5ppd to author: 608 Lincoln Avenue #100, St. Paul, MN 55102



try these



LIT-MAGS

- 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).
- ART:MAG #22:** Peter Magliocco puts together 76 pages of goodness with a free-buffet table sized helping of some of the best in the small press. This is the 15th Anniversary Issue!!! Besides the excellent poetics, there are several stand-out ink drawings by Lilia Levin. Send \$5 to Limited Editions Press, pobox 70896, Las Vegas, NV 89170.
- DRIVERS SIDE AIRBAG:** Comics, short fiction, poetics, killer illustrations and sometimes a dirty picture. Usually around 50pp, letter-half, loaded with edgy, biting, and intelligent, sometimes sardonic pieces. Issue 40 is \$3 and submissions should be sent to pobox 25760, Los Angeles, CA 90025.
- HEELTAP:** Richard D.Houff, 2054 Montreal Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55116. Mostly poetry, excellent production. Send \$4ppd for a sample.
- THE ICONOCLAST:** A mag loaded with intelligent, strongly crafted poetics, short fiction, art and reviews. A good long, thought-provoking read. Issue #64 out now for just \$3. Send submissions to: 1675 Amazon Road, Mohegan Lake, NY 10547.
- 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.
- 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.
- THE SILT READER:** A crisp, clean quarter-page-sized collection of lean poetics that provide a quick, energetic and entertaining read. Elegantly and precisely produced by Robert Roden and Barton Saunders. Just \$2 to Temporary Vandalism (checks to Robert Roden), pobox 6184, Orange, California 82863.
- UNDER SURVEILLANCE:** British mag of poetics that is loaded with tough, intelligent words with little if any wasted type. Cool fast-paced pieces, sort of punk, clean, dirty, earnest and abstracted all in one. Send a few bucks to 107 Southover Street, Brighton, East Sussex, BN2 2UA, England.

CHAPS AND BOOKS

- DOSSIER by Stepan Chapman:** This collection of bizzare and eclectic short stories could be considered absurdist sci-fi without pigeonholing these killer pieces of ultra-creative thought-juice into a particular genre. Not only are the shorts entertaining, they welcome your mind into various new worlds merging succinct detailing with the freewheeling humor that provokes engaging thought. Just \$13.95 through www.amazon.com, www.bn.com or your local book store.
- SLOGAN'S RUN by Robert Roden:** I'm not sure which impresses me more, the killer collection of short poetics and observations mingled with photographs or the exceptional production by Showerhead Press. First the words: you get over 30 pages of short blasts of concise and thoughtful commentary on consumerism, women, beauty, hypocrisy and even graffiti. The center pages are on a glossy stock with several photos accompanied by terse observations. Several substrates hold the ink in this chap: paper bag, transparencies, glossy stock, and standard colored paper are creatively interspersed with seeming purpose and intention. A chap you want to keep forever. \$5 from Showerhead Press, 9430 Claire Ave., Northridge, CA 91324.
- HARD BUCKS by William Hart:** This “blue collar odyssey” is a secret peek into worlds and work that may have eluded you, regardless of your labor proficiency or lack thereof. Crisp realism and succinct, power-packed words make this a cool read and presses snapshots past your eyeballs of the people that surround us in our working world every day. This one's worth the \$5 to: Swan Duckling Press, pobox 586, Cypress, California 90630.
- BLUES FOR BIRD by Martin Gray:** Rather than blues, this is a well-crafted celebration of the short life of Charlie Parker. I've got the first six in this 12-part series of chaps and it's easy to sink right in and devour Gray's poetics. Perhaps overshadowing the delivery is the story itself. It would be difficult to pen an uninteresting exploration of the compelling and groundswell/-breaking master of the alto sax. Hell, Parker inspired so many wicked jazz-horn blasters, he may as well have inspired the poet in Gray. Besides a few painful typos, it's worth a read and re-read. \$5 to Alpha Beat, 31 Waterloo St., New Hope, PA 18938.
- “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.**