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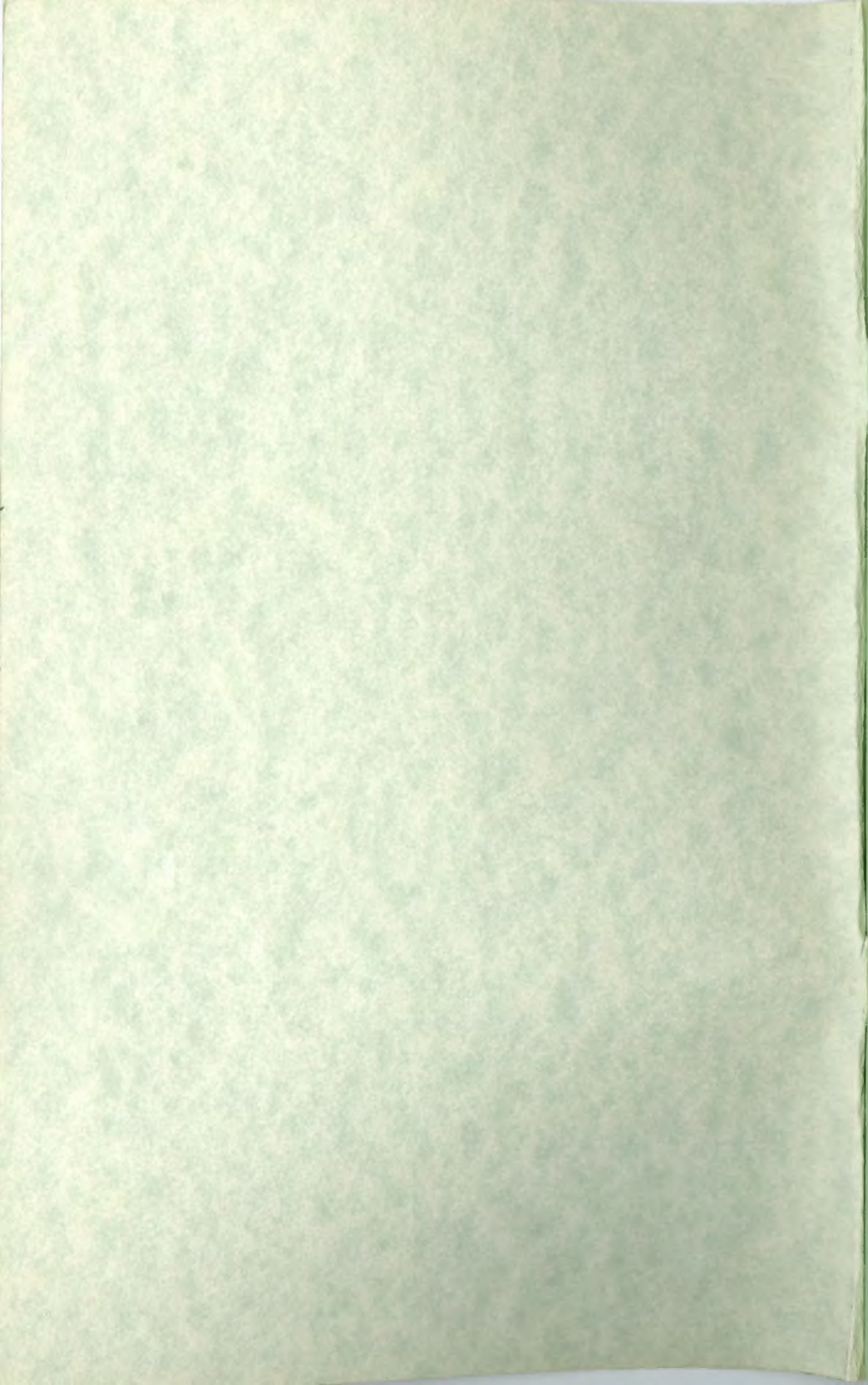
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Imprints
Volume III

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Imprints is the official publication for Sigma Tau Delta, the honorary English fraternity. The editors welcome creative works submitted by contributors and also publish winners of the annual T. E. Ferguson Writing Contest. Especially welcome are poems, fiction pieces and essays of no more than 5,000 words in length. At this time, we would like to express our gratitude to David Whitescarver, Sigma Tau Delta faculty advisor, for his unrelenting optimism and valuable help in the preparation of this journal.

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IMPRINTS

Literary Journal of Sigma Tau Delta
Stephen F. Austin State University

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title	Page
<u>T. E. Ferguson Award Winners:</u>	
UNDERGRADUATE DIVISION	
"Distant Shores," "Death in the W.C.," and "What You Are" by Laura Lundgren (First Place)	1-3
"Game!" by Sandra L. Stanley (Second Place)	4-11
"The Psychopath" by Melissa Miller (Third Place)	12-24
HONORABLE MENTION	
"Beware of Those Smiling Teeth" by Curtis Simmons	25-28
GRADUATE DIVISION	
"Art in the Garden," "The Last Word," and "The Stranger Thief" by Vaughn Hamilton (First Place)	29-37
HONORABLE MENTION	
"Staring at Each Other's Shadows and Nodding Attentively" and "Little Jerry Learns His Vowels" by Steve Geissen	40-42

HONORABLE MENTION
(Continued)

"After Agonizing," "Come, End Winter," and "Stuff of Dreams" by Sandra Stanley	43-46
"The Front" by Edward Shelton	47-56
"Requiem," "Dedalus," and "Soldier, Come" by James L. Choron	57-63
"There Are Those Times," "The Boys of Time," and "The Canvas" by Anderson Kelley	64-69
"first day of that texas summer" by Andrew J. Urbanus	70-72
"Proserpina's Lament" and "No Apologies" by Gordon Garrett Conner	73-75
"Silent Tornado" and "Dark Meetings" by James Chionsini, Jr.	76-79
"Words to Write" and "A Memory Passage" by Paul M. Thomason	80-83
"Scars" and "The Wicks Will See" by Carol McBrayer	84-85
"Real Women" by Jessica Anton	86

Distant Shores

I will allow you this and no more.
Because I am blood
And you are vein
And you are the brilliant sun
And I walk steady circles
Tracing our shadows.
Do not call me honorable:
I am not death on foreign sands
Many miles away
And I will not burn incense
At the altar I have built for you.
Do not ask why I am sad
And I will not question you.
We are lost in this forest
Together.
We cross the deep rivers
Hand in hand.
And if one crosses safely,
Both will.
And if one is lost,
Both are swept away.
Remember the sudden, unexpected
Rain
Though recall also droughts.
In memory of this, do not say
You love me.
I cannot answer you.
For we have a long journey
Ahead, and many miles together
Before we reach the opposing shore.
I will allow you this,
And nothing more.

by LAURA LUNDGREN

Death in the W.C.

The buttons on my shirt-front
Too heavy
I snip them off
Each one
Clicking banging
Against white porcelain
Small explosions inside
And those shouting echoes
Bowing because I
Can no longer stand
I touch my forehead
To this tile
Where unspeakable things
Have dripped before
Dripped with splattering
Ridicule
Stretching out with hope
To the cracks in my floor
I begin to chant
The sound bouncing
Off the stainless steel
Scrubbing bubbles
Of flat notes slurred
Over this thick tongue.
You'll find me,
Limp finger frozen tracing
Plastic bathtub daisies
Knees reflected in shiny
Elbow joint
Cheek pressed against
The tender shower curtain
My peeping Cross-My-Heart
Bra
Stained with the blood
Of a life
It could do nothing
To save.

by LAURA LUNDGREN

What You Are

You try and look pensive
But your thoughts
fall down
around your feet
You pick at your hands,
At your sleeve
All the while wondering
what dread disease
It is you've got.
Really never guessing exactly.

You're disappointed when the
movie starts.
You spend the whole time
Trying to guess the end
And folding your ticket
Over
and
Over in the dark
With sweaty hands.

At night you force yourself
to bed
Then lie there wishing for
Another heartbeat to listen to
But staring only at
the second empty pillow
Until sleep comes like
suicide.

by LAURA LUNDGREN

GAME!

!DIR./DEMO (enter)

!DIR.LABYRINTH (enter)

Electric-blue, silver, xanthic, copper lightning zigzagged iridescently across the ebony void. Tarnished, flicked again, evaporated. Amorphous matter funneled into solid form before my eyes, casting an eerie glow over me, turning skin and clothing, blue. Light radiated from an enormous, massive door frame. Suddenly, the immense Door swung silently inward. I checked the readout on the digital computer strapped to my right wrist. The faint amber glow pulsed, reassured me. The Game was activated. I nimbly crossed the threshold; my thoughts were as explorers cautiously entering jungled, uncharted territories.

It had been almost two weeks since anyone had seen or talked to Aren. I was extremely angry. It wasn't like him to stay away. He just wasn't happy unless he could bother someone. Especially me. He had nonchalantly told me about the Game--knowing I would love it--and then chalked one up as he purposely avoided telling me any clues or directions to play it. He simply gave me the access code and said, "Try it, and let me know how you like it." Jeez! I knew that beneath his underhanded niceness, he believed I was neither intelligent nor logical enough to play without turning to him for help. I

wouldn't lower myself. What Aren did not know (heh heh), was who I knew. I immediately took the access code to Phip, (a computer genius), and showed him the Game. He gladly shared with me various shortcuts and tricks to gain points and ground. Once, before Aren's physical deletion from my life, I told him I had zapped a dragon into nonexistence. No fanfare, understand, just a simple statement of fact. However, I could tell by the lust in his topaz eyes, that he was both physically excited and mentally amazed. He finally shut his mouth enough to ask if I had found the Upside-down Lava flow. I told him (tongue-in-cheek) to GO AROUND BACKWARD. His mouth dropped open again. I could tell he was having a bad time of it.

"You actually got that far?" He asked, awe-struck.

"Yep," I retorted smugly. Earlier that same morning, Phip had told me (warned me) that when I got to the Upside-down Lava flow to GO AROUND BACKWARD. Of course I didn't see any point to tell Aren how I'd acquired the information, and I didn't particularly want to, either. *Standing in the corridor, the faint blue light dissolved into an almost palpable insubstantiality. Blackness wrapped around me. I could not see, but I knew that two steps ahead on the floor lay an old-fashioned, battery-type flashlight.

One.

Two.

I bent over, groped around with my hands

until I felt the cold plastic cylindrical shape, picked it up, then clicked it on.

The Game room was the COMP/LINK control station in the library, where I worked at the University of Southern States. I was not technically versed in computer literacy or programming, so I did not fully understand how COMP/LINK worked --I just knew it did. The room, housing the station in the library, was equipped with a full-scale 360 degree holographic projector, an access terminal, and nothing more. The room measured 14x16 feet in area and was over 10 feet high. The walls were made of translucent plastic compound, totally sound-proof. The access terminal, encased in a pre-molded plastic couch, arched overtop a person, so that the screen remained at eye level, no matter the recliner's position. A full keyboard tilted up from the screen's base, and on the right armrest, a smaller set of function keys lay within finger reach.

When the students at the University used COMP/LINK, the holographic images were produced on the far wall; however, full holographic projections were used by faculty/staff members. They were the only ones with access to the 360 degree pattern and used the entire space in the room as the projection surface. No one else knew the pattern existed. I had doubted Aren's veracity about the Game, when he failed to mention the projection degree used while playing the Game. (It should be activated at full 360 degrees, naturally!) Aren was just a Grad-student, so I guessed he had

learned about the Game from the Computer Lab, where he did work/study, before they had fired him.

*The flashlight's thin thread of yellowed light illuminated the crusty stone walls of the entrance corridor. In front of me an intersection crossed the passageway, running east and west. I flashed my light down each side path as I passed. I would never go their route, for Phip had warned me of the dangers. Past the junction, stone steps spiraled down. Quickly I descended, my fingertips barely brushing against ice cold stone. At the bottom, a small stone-floored chamber arched upward into oblivion. Six passageways entered the room at precise intervals around the stone walls, like spokes radiating from a central axis. A musette bag lay on the ground with a leather canteen nearby. I took them and swung their straps over my shoulder. I needed food and water this Game--I planned to play awhile.

As long as I didn't get caught, the rules of the Game were simple. The Game used my security code for access, but the Game was not work-oriented: it was illegal. When the Game activated, the entire room turned into the playing field. The hologram appeared so realistically that physical and emotional senses denied the existence of the original room. Reality became the hologram, and I transported into another world, another time. The Game did not commence until I stepped from the terminal/couch onto Grid/square #24. Some computer hacks said

that the entire floor became a grid of 224 blocks. The Door opened on Grid/square #8 and the terminal/couch covered Grid/squares #9 and #25. The play progressed with movement across the floor grids. All objects found could be kept, used, discarded, or avoided entirely. Water and food materialized at various intervals, but I had never eaten anything during a Game. COMP/ Time had been too short.

*I flashed my light over the entrance to each tunnel, making sure that I counted correctly to find the fourth corridor from the left. The last Game I had counted wrong, because I got stuck in a maze and could not find my way back out. I had had to Q/OUT. (Aren would have laughed until his sides split, if he'd known.) This time, sure I'd made the right choice, I entered a corridor where walls oozed slime mold that smelled like strong sulfur. The further I progressed along the subterranean shaft, the smaller it became, until I was crawling on my hands and knees down an extremely claustrophobic tunnel. The smell permeated my senses until I thought I would pass out from the noxious invasion. The first time through, I had thought Phip wrong about the corridor, nor was this time through any easier. Just when I decided to start backing out, a sharp turn opened into a miniature cellaret. The smell dissolved and I gasped clean air into my lungs. I fell exhausted, face-forward, onto the floor.

In the Game when I came up against

something I could not handle--like the time I edged around a sharp angle of stone, without a weapon (I had accidentally dropped my sting-gun down an infernal chasm) and almost ran into a pack of spidery critters with evil, fluorescent eyes and elongated fangs, sharp as needles - I would Q/Out. The digital computer/watch was worn for this reason only. After punching the Q-button, then enter, the horror vanished with an indigo flash, leaving me standing in the middle of the COMP/LINK room. I had seen one of the creatures lunge at me as I deactivated the Game. The strangest thing: a long scratch was bleeding profusely on my forearm. It scared me until I reasoned that I had probably done it myself.

The Game must have had a natural exit at the Labyrinth's end, but neither Phip nor anyone else had ever found it.

*After turning over on my back to rest on the cool stone floor, I clicked the flashlight off. I needed to save the batteries. I did not know how long I lay in the insidious darkened calm, before I consciously noticed a strange noise. There was nothing in the room, dangerous or otherwise--yet I had forgotten that COMP/LINK could insert random, new problems just when I assumed there were none. The sound persisted and grew increasingly louder. (Closer?) It originated from the only other passage leading out of the room, so I turned over and backed up against the edge of the tunnel where I had entered. The light

off: I breathed through my mouth, slowly.
I waited.

Something entered the cellaret. The sound
came from a shuffling movement, while yet
another sound, the distinct rasping noise
of breathing, filtered into my awareness.
I knew it to be a human sound.

I pulled my arms forward, in front of my
face, with the digital read-out glowing
like flame. I didn't try to hide the
light, I was scared and ready to Q/Out.
My thoughts were mass confusion. It was
impossible for another person to be
physically within the same Game. How
could this happen? It was not fair! I
would have to start all over again. This
had been MY Game! I started to punch the
Q-button when a masculine voice
reverberated from out of the dark.

"Don't Q/Out, Andra!"

The voice belonged to Aren! I was
suddenly, blushingly mortified. He was
here? How could that be? I dropped my
arms, then pointed the flashlight toward
him, clicked it on. He looked terrible,
as if he'd been to Hell and back again.
"What are you doing here?" I managed to
mumble through clenched teeth. He
laughed.

"Waiting for you..."

His laughter softened as he walked over to
me, reached down and tore my digital
computer off my wrist. Before I could
comprehend his actions, he had stepped on
my watch. Shards of computer chips, metal
and plastic lay uselessly ground to bits
on the stone floor. The amber light

blinked out.

Hysterical laughter bubbled out through my mouth then turned into the manic haunted screams of nightmare.

I was trapped in the Labyrinth of the Game with Aren...and no way to Q/Out!

by SANDRA L. STANLEY

THE PSYCHOPATH

We'd moved to U. in the southwest part of Texas the spring before; I still wasn't used to the spare, granulated earth, that spiky, sand-spurred ruggedness that seemed to shimmer at a distance like a lake of boiling wine. The umbrella trees along Highway 90 were squat and shadeless. All was bled of color, from the clumps of isolated grass to the mesquite stumps and arid juniper bush. It was a lateral world, and in it, under the severe and relentless mineral blue of the western sky, I felt perilously exposed, as if I took up too much space in height but never, ever enough in depth.

The empty gaps and huge, rolling spaces were so unlike East Texas that I was heartsick till the end of summer. It was in August that other preoccupations began to take shape, that the human element so thankfully missing among the yellow pines of Nacogdoches took on more weight than I could bear.

But then it's from the unbearable that we learn our moral lessons; we take our cues for a lifetime from that which, as catastrophic theory would have it, parts company with the norm, with the comfort of our concept of the everlasting and unchangeable.

###

My father, an elder of a cult I dare not name, was sent to U. on "missionary" work. U. was a small city of lapsed Baptists in the heart of Texas sheep country. I quickly learned that there were three social classes: the rancher, elite of the outskirts; the professional and small business bourgeoisie of downtown; and the Mexicans. My father's obligation was to the Mexican community. More or less fluent thanks to a year at the University of Guadalajara, my father spent most weekdays going door-to-door, trying to reach lost souls in their native language. The idea was to get them to the temple on Sundays; at best, the "barrio" neighbors made donations and listened to his street sermon over coffee and pan dulce from the bakery off Main.

My mother was a rationalist, a science teacher then unemployed and at a loss in a town so far from Baltimore. She could not bear temple on Sunday, the shoebox stucco building in which elders and initiates alike stood in smocks row after row behind invisible pews, heads hung in silent prayer. The celebration was as monochromatic and unvarying as a Gregorian chant--without sound. There was no sermon, just two silent, sweat-drenched hours in which the best of us repented, and the worst of us fidgeted and struggled to keep our bodies aligned to our faltering piety.

I "believed" because it was, I thought then, my destiny. I was twelve, on the threshold of an adulthood torn by science and faith. In East Texas that faith I called my father's had made sense. It could be manipulated, interpreted a thousand different ways. Nature in East Texas was a cathedral. All was steepled and hushed; even the giant surviving Caddo mounds pushed upward. An infinite variety of shade enriched even the strictest approach to Scripture. I took the silent Word of the temple and paganized it among the ivy-trellised and succulent forest groves behind our house. And where the reddish clay-churned stream was once struck by a shaft of milky twilight, and its underside looked like molten copper pennies, I laid a wreath of honeysuckle to whatever god might listen. I built altars sequined with berries and woven with pampas grass. They smelled ancient, older than Scripture, but truer than science.

But in U., I could do nothing remotely natural. There was no place to burrow, worship, bury treasures or offerings to the divine. There was only a barbed wire fence. a family of goats that gnawed at the rosebushes and spoiled the bed of mint and thyme my mother tried to grow, and spiritless, odorless, gritty sirocco that blew in from God knows where--maybe as far away as the Chihuahua Desert--to remind me how far I had come.

In August, though, life took a different turn. Though my mother still drank on the porch most evenings, fretting noiselessly about her poor luck, taking her cigarette butts apart and filling her empty beer can with moldy tobacco, though she still couldn't bring herself to cook dinner or do anything sensible with her time except read Phyllis Whitney novels from the public library, my endless, friendless days came to an end.

I got to know the Estrella Bakery owner, a large Mexican woman named Maria Eugenia who knew all the gossip there was to know. She was to me like Delphi; she kept all those wrenching secrets our temple kept at bay with its brutal silences. For relief and information, then, I went to Maria Eugenia on weekend afternoons, Sundays in particular, to spend a few nickels on pan dulce and hot chocolate; while she, tuned into her Nortena waltzes, told me what life was really like.

One particular Sunday in mid-August, my father led silent prayer, and my mother stood behind me, as always awe-struck, hungover and not a little ashamed to be among the pious. She always looked so painfully out of place, so tall and broad, like a Maenad with her gray-streaked auburn hair, a foot taller than the little blue-haired matrons and the reed-slender novices of the women's section. As I knelt for the final silent devotional, I could feel her resentful stillness like

the onslaught of Chaos behind me. It was then that the elaborately simple, monolithic nature of my father's faith came apart. I watched it decompose, then wither into the saffron-stained collar of the elderly man in front of me. For the first time, I saw those around me, those in front of me--how the stem of the old man's neck swayed as though the heavy snowdrop head attached to it might sharply swing forward and break it...

It had started at breakfast. My mother was sitting girlishly on the counter, in a pink satin robe stained with coffee and cigarette burns. Her wild hair stood out damply in the heat, and her eyes seemed to swim bloodshot and violet beneath dark circles several weeks old.

"Tell me about that psychopath," she asked my father, who was reading the temple devotional.

"What's to say," he read on. "Get ready for temple."

"How old is he?" My mother could be relentless.

"Get ready. It's not a big deal."

My mother looked at me as I took my place at the table. "We finally have something interesting to talk about, a real phenomenon that you can feel, touch, see, not just a few Scriptural archetypes to

cry and pray over, and your father refuses to speak up."

How right my mother was... At temple we learned only about the Fallen, the Lost, and the Saved (or Resurrected). The variety of the human species, to quote Virginia Woolf, did not exist. Good and evil tugged away in a Manichean struggle from which there was no escape until the foot washing at the end of prayer.

I hated foot washing. Mother refused to partake. The elders would seat us along the altar, place a bowl at our feet, and then proceed, with infinite care and gentleness, to bathe every part of our feet, even between our toes. I only felt discomfort, and could not help but wonder who was the more humbled: the washer, or the washed.

The Archetypes from our devotional read like a pathetically brief Jungian Tarot deck. But there was safety in that, a sense that with a modicum of humility and a lot of faith, one could secure Heaven's grace. Good works were optional.

That morning, at breakfast, in that old, ramshackle shed of a house, with its cracked linoleum floor and its web-sticky, sunny corners, I began my descent into a realm beyond good or evil...

"I'll tell you about him," my father said. "He's twelve. He's beautiful, like a

fawn. When I went to speak with him on behalf of the temple, I thought I'd be speaking to evil incarnate, or at least a Fallen One. What I saw was uncanny. I don't care what they say: he didn't burn his mother to death. He watched her burn to death. There's a difference."

"Aha," my mother was quite animated now. She smelled an intellectual dilemma. "What difference is there? Couldn't you call it complicity?"

"No," my father said, shutting the devotional. He seemed confused, disoriented. "Get ready for temple."

After temple, I changed out of my white smock into jeans and a t-shirt. I ran to Maria Eugenia's, hoping to get her counsel. I hadn't a clue as to what psychopath really meant, that is, outside the dictionary. I expected my oracle would know.

Maria Eugenia was in the pantry listening to Ruben Naranjo on an Eagle Pass station and smoking a Camel while she iced a small cake and stuffed the huge ovens with bolillos. Sometimes the ashes were sprinkled over the pan dulce; I didn't object because the ashes seemed like blessings to me.

"Hallo," she said, smiling, "my favorite customer. And what for you today?"

I liked the scarves she wore around her head, her skin so Gaugin-heathen and smooth, hairless. She was tall, wide, like my mother, but so much more alive and exhilarated by the thought of living.

"I want to know," I said, taking a stool by the vats of fresh tortilla masa. "I want to know about the psychopath."

Behind Montgomery Ward's downtown, not two blocks away from Mexican Town where we lived, was a cluster of old stucco buildings abandoned to ruin or squatters, each fitted with a hitching post and trough.

The morning I went looking for the Psychopath, treasure map in hand (courtesy of Maria Eugenia), was glorious. It was a perfect configuration of time, space, and circumstances. The cul-de-sac behind the buildings was enchanted: exquisite bushes plumed with violet sage grew streetside; while high rosebushes met them halfway over barbed wire fences, the blooms translucent, veined and moist, as if cast in rosy flesh. The air was buttery and languid. We were blessed that day with a cumulus-mottled sky, so that the sun fell in strands and not in showers.

I felt as if I faced perfections, not the Scriptural kind, but the temporal, earthly kind, which in a way I would cherish more thereafter. And though I quoted the devotional, recalled the lake of fire, the

horned beasts of our version of Revelations, Christblood was in the leaves, in the autumnal, metallic smell of them as the driest fell. God, or gods, pelted the dirt road with its baby chicks and goat droppings with dried azalea blossoms as thick and caramel-colored as dried apricots.

The further I got up the narrow road, the more hardwoods and the fewer shacks I encountered. Soon, I was facing a field of weeds and grazing goats. The sun moved higher and higher, and though clothed in strata of cumulus, began to sting the back of my neck.

I felt lost, but curious. I was certain now that my father's faith did not apply, that the Psychopath lived outside the boundaries, offending God, tempting Nemesis.

I came upon what seemed to be an oasis of hardwoods. I could hear the cicada, mounting their futile uproar. Noon always seemed to overtake me in West Texas, like a horseman with dishonorable intentions; all of a sudden it would be there, pouring out of every leaf, every dust particle, every bough, every corner of the horizon.

Through the trees, I saw a trailer house with a new, cherry-painted wooden verandah built onto it. I don't know whatever possessed me to push back the wrought iron fence to let myself in. But in a matter

of seconds I was walking toward that cheap, makeshift verandah, toward that squalid aluminum, unpainted trailer with its detached aluminum shed, flanked on all sides by stripped, gutted old Plymouths half sunk in rust, grass, and grocery bags stuffed with garbage.

On that verandah was the grail, the sum of the pilgrim's quest. I tripped over a tire spoke stuck upright in the dirt, and a pit bull snarled at me from its doghouse. A tangle of old, rusty chains fanned out across the front lawn like a display of snakes. A dead field rat, its neck messily broken and bloody, had begun to smell under a tricycle I guessed no one had ridden in years. Several yards of moldy hose were wrapped around the limbs of hackberries; I stepped on beer glass.

("If you go there," Maria Eugenia had told me, "don't blame me. Remember always that it does exist.")

My steady approach in no way disturbed the scene on the verandah. A human torso "sat" on an old wooden rocker, twisting and turning as best it could. The mouth was distorted by sounds blocked by the cicada, or by hysteria--mine and its. The rocker barely moved for all the intended furor spent upon it. The head made hideous ducking motions; the vacant jeans legs flapped in the smoothest and blandest of breezes, as if torso and phantom limbs were not part of the same picture.

Armless sleeves seemed to wave at me, beckoning, friendly.

To the side was a boy. Not entirely ordinary either. He was beautiful, and so still, I mistook his body for some terracotta ceramic. He was facing, and unblinkingly staring at, the desperate torso as if he were watching Saturday morning cartoons.

All peripheral details fell away, although in later years I'd recall them like talismans to protect me from the nightmare of the ghastly spectacle I'd willed myself to witness. The closer I got, the more horrible the sight. The torso was a man, a young man with thick hair whose pomade I could smell from where I finally had stopped to take it all in. His face was covered with sweat as thick as axle grease, as if he'd just broken off of some huge piece of cosmic machinery. He was ducking and twisting away from a huge wasp that, playing with its quarry from a number of angles, was too fascinated to move on.

The boy was neither enthralled nor bored; he just watched, a little expectantly perhaps. After all, he'd watched his mother burn to death, a hard act to follow.

I finally caught up with the torso's sounds. They were high-pitched, but weak, as if he'd been crying out for a long,

long time. High noon was everywhere, scouring every shade for relief. And the scene dragged on and on. The boy began to tap his left arm with his fingers, his body leaning to one side.

It was then I knew that the lake of fire, the horned beasts, the whores and the heathens and the tempters were safer than this, this boy and his vague, expectant stare. He didn't know that suffering bonded, moved, and repulsed. At least the devil knew what suffering meant to mankind. Satan was a doer; this boy wanted it done for him. His beauty would draw to him a circle of procurers for whom no variety of human sacrifice would be too grotesque a gift to bring him.

There was in all this the seed of a malignancy far inferior to the tacky and endearing evil of traditional Hell. As the wasp closed in for a kill, and the torso's head flung forward to buy more time, I knew it was not a matter of the boy's complicity with an act of nature.

It was a gross lack of empathy. And a lack of empathy creates demigods.

There would be no gods before him. He had the power to draw in what he wanted, and he wanted his desires gratified. One act would have to surpass another. The boredom was setting in. This was not Montezuma on the night of the 20,000; after all, those bleating hearts went to

heaven to the gods. Here was no despairing of the supernatural, but an ungovernable hunger to be entertained.

Relief was nowhere in sight. The torso was at the point of surrender, but I sensed that in some way the scene was interminable. Not eternal, which implies greatness, but interminable. For a moment, the boy's face turned toward mine, and the arresting profile turned into a kind of murky surliness, that of a child's interrupted at play. I was reminded of trespassed sandboxes and cheated dodge ball outcomes, and I wondered at how terrible but mean-spirited our gods had become.

by MELISSA MILLER

BEWARE OF THOSE SMILING TEETH

I hate people that smile. Now don't get me wrong, I am not a pessimistic person. I like to smile, laugh, and have a good time as well as the next person, but I don't like people who smile constantly. You know the type, they form the biggest smile they can possibly stretch across their faces, so that every tooth catches the gleam of the sunlight. If it's raining outside, they smile. If their lives are falling apart, they smile. If World War III breaks out, they smile . . . constantly.

I could understand this constant smiling, if these people had something in their mouths to show off. If a woman has a beautiful figure, she wears a skimpy swim suit. If a man has big muscles, he wears a shirt that is three sizes too small. But a mouth? Come on, even those people who have had excessive dental work still do not have sexy mouths. I can just see a couple out on a date, and the boy says to the girl,

"Gee, did you know that you have beautiful molars?"

Give me a break.

Now, I can appreciate fine dental work, but I have no desire to peer at one's teeth for any long duration of time. Constant smiling has no logic in it whatsoever, and it is perfectly useless.

Have you ever talked to a smiling

person? I mean, have you ever talked to one face to face? Talking face to face with a smiling person has to be the most annoying and grotesque situation a normal human being can fall into. There was a friend of the family once who was a smiler. Now, she was not just a normal smiler, she made a profession of it. A perfect shade of lipstick always covered her lips so that her glamorous smile would be brought out. She was a wonderful woman. I loved her dearly and I fed her table scraps whenever she came to visit us. I remember one of her visits vividly. She came through the front door of my parents' home and strolled across the room to meet me. I watched in stark terror as that great big smile of her's got closer and closer. She finally stopped approaching when her smiling face was only a few inches from mine. A quick greeting was said, and then she began to relate one of her long, drawn-out stories about cousin Howard, whom I do not even know. As she talked, I tried to back away and put some distance between our faces, but she compensated for the loss of air space and eased in a little closer. The story rattled on and her smile never ceased. Eventually, streams of saliva began to run down from her gums and collect on her front teeth. She interrupted her story and wiped the saliva away with one rip of the tongue. The saliva then collected at the back of her throat, and she sent it on its way with one small gulp. The story continued and I began to fantasize about

grabbing her face and giving it a big shove, or maybe just screaming as loud as I possibly could. But these feelings passed in a few moments, and I began to feel the first hints of insanity. My stomach made sickly, rolling motions and I began contemplating her death by some horrible means of torture. I finally excused myself and I quickly retreated to another area of the house. This dear woman (God rest her soul) died a few years ago, and I attended her funeral. Her death was a sad (but glorious!) time, and as I walked by the casket, I could have sworn that the corners of her mouth were slightly turned upward.

Even though constant smiling is annoying and illogical, I have made an even greater discovery. Smiling people are evil. Have you ever looked at a model closely? The beautiful model's glimmering teeth say,

"I love you and I want you to buy these wonderful clothes I'm wearing." Now, take a piece of paper and cover up her smiling mouth. What do you see? Eyes. Yes, that's right, eyes. Now read them. While the model's teeth are saying,

"I love you and I love these clothes,"

her eyes are saying,

"I hate you, this job, this photographer, and especially these clothes."

The eyes reveal all.

Watch a cat sometime. A cat stalks its prey with a flexed smile on its "harmless" face, but its eyes are waiting for the

glory of a brutal attack. I have found most smiling people to be this way also. Their constant smile says, "Hey! I'm your friend!" but their eyes say, "I'm going to take you for all you're worth."

Now, dear reader, I may sound slightly paranoid, and maybe I am to a certain extent. But I watch people, and I have learned to read between the lines, or the teeth to be more exact. So, the next time you are confronted with those bright, flashy, never-ceasing teeth, and you are unsure of that person's real goal, read the eyes. They reveal all. I walked into a college class once, and the instructor entered with a grin that would make Joan Collins look sick. Her pearly, white teeth said, "Welcome. We are going to have a wonderful time," but her dark, little eyes said, "I'm going to flunk you if I possibly can." I dropped the class.

by CURTIS SIMMONS

Art in the Garden

The first thing you see are the heavy nylons, with two runs down each calf, finally sagging and then wrinkling around the large white ankles--the cow size ankles of a working farm woman. Her hooves are made of black leather turned gray and are heavy and big. They hold not only the farm woman's large white feet but also the black gumbo called soil. The heavy ankles of folded nylon and the heavier still black shoes, resembling hooves in the mud, move slowly between two long, long rows of string beans and beets. Every now and then an extra sturdy, double sacked, brown paper grocery bag will be lowered to the garden floor only to be picked back up again as soon as the black leather hooves move a few more feet down the line. Soon the sack fills out and begins to bleed purple on the bottom. There is also the sweet smell of bruised leaves and stems.

She (the heroine of our story) leaves the muddy black garden and stops beside a fairly small building made of wood that has nearly all rotted into gray dust. It surely would fall down to the black ground this very evening if it were not for the nails which themselves are well on the road to red dust. Beside the building she deliberately sets the bulging, bleeding sack of beets and string beans and then walks away. For about five or thirty minutes the bag just sits there like some

not-very-well-made statue would in a not-very-well-known American museum. Then a yellow legged chicken with dirt stained white feathers and stupid black eyes staggers (like all chickens do) over to the bleeding grocery sack. Just as the chicken puts its beak to the sack, a smooth stone from God knows where hits the chicken. There is, of course, loud squawking and the stupid chicken naturally runs away, leaving two little feathers behind with the smooth stone, the old shed, and the sack of vegetables which came from the muddy garden.

About that time tenses changed and the leather hooves returned with the big nyloned ankles to fetch the paper bag of bleeding beets and string beans. The sack left the ground. Then for some thirty or forty yards the woman walked across what evidently was a barn yard, for mixed in with all the gravel were perhaps a dozen different brands of excrement. There was white and gray stuff left from pigeons and chickens and geese and ducks; there were round brown pieces from rabbits; there were large round or oval pieces which still contained whole oats; stuff that was of no shape, only pieces in the gravel and dirt; goat pieces; guinea hen pieces; dog pieces; cat pieces, mule pieces; hog pieces; more pieces than you could ever put back together. Carried over all these pieces of stuff was the double sacked bag of string beans and bleeding beets.

They kept right on till they came to some paintless boards laid out on blocks

of wood. These were the steps which offered assistance to those mounting a paintless porch of a very great age. Once more the bag of string beans and beets was set down, this time against a post which rested on the many-cracked and paintless porch boards. For a few quiet minutes the sack stood there, taking in the cool evening air, the whippoorwill's sober song, and the gentle light of a sun on top of a hill line. When the screen door creaked and banged shut again, the big ankled woman re- turned, but without the black leather hooves on. She wore only her sagging nylons and white flesh which turned a bit redder around the toes. The bag was taken from the cool air into the hot steamy air--the suffocatingly humid air of the woman's kitchen.

It was equipped with the best: a fine two and a half year old no-wax linoleum floor (which had been laid down over a ninety-five year old oak floor), a stack of yellow newspapers in one corner that were old enough to be used for history books, two empty quart-size glass milk bottles with a thick layer of dried milk at the bottom of each, a blind cat asleep under a table, and several blood stained mouse traps behind the counter (one of the traps was set ready for the kill but with the bait, a dried up crusty piece of yellow meat, fallen off to the side so that any robber might take his fill). In this setting the beets and string beans met their end and their burial.

The beets and string beans were cut,

scrubbed, given the final inquisition, and, failing to recant, they were boiled and set to rest in steamy glass jars without tables, tombs without epitaphs.

Two days later the big white feet slipped on the no-wax linoleum floor. They pointed their white toes up and did not move--not even when a cold wind blew open the door, nor when a rooster staggered into the kitchen, nor when the blind cat walked away for good.

A week later large black boots, real shiny and polished, walked into the drafty kitchen and stopped beside the fat white feet. More shiny black boots came in later and took away the unnamed farm woman but left the clear jars of bloody beets and string beans.

Many years later, when grasses grew up between the paintless and cracked boards of the porch, when the animals were all gone, when the garden rows were barely even noticeable under purple thistles, four small feet in clean white shoes came running around the place. They seemed so light. They went into the dusty old kitchen and ran circles around the table kicking up powdery dust and little pieces of yellow and brown history. They took the jars of beets and string beans out into the old barn yard. Then, with all the wisdom of the present, knowing all the stories about truth and right, the owners of the little feet hurled the clear jars of faceless past headlong and with terrific accuracy into the sturdy base of some old oak, thus letting bygones be

bygones as the saying goes. The little feet jumped up and down and then ran off lightly as they had come.

by VAUGHN HAMILTON

The Last Word

I

darkness birth milk meat dates degree wife
success same
morning evening morning evening morning
evening same
morning evening morning evening morning
evening noon afternoon 5:00
dinner kids small noise quiet 10:30 bed
bathroom bed same

II

eggs juice coat slippery crowd turnstile
wait train paper push paper
push paper push 5:00 same
day week day day drowsy same

III

eggs juice coat foggy crowd turnstile wait
train pause pause stare eyes
two stare eyes two she she she gone paper
push paper push 5:00 same

IV

eggs juice coat slippery crowd turnstile
wait train again stare eyes eyes
she eyes smile gone paper push paper push
5:00 same

V

eggs juice smile coat sky crowd turnstile
wait wait train again again eyes
smile legs eyes word smile word she word
rendezvous smile gone paper push
smile paper push 5:00 dream

VI

eggs juice grin coat blue crowd turnstile
wait train grin wait eyes she
smile grin smile nod she she she gone
paper push grin paper push 5:00
shower drink coat stars keys car city-
limit grin road gravel cattle-guard
dirt stars grin sweat 9:20

VII

9:22 sweat wait wait grin park keys wait
9:24 door walk stand wait stars
cold half-moon stand 9:27 trees shack look
wait owl cold stars sweat sound
lights grin turn see she sweat 9:31

VIII

10:05 breathing sweat shack lantern red
grin breathing breathing breathing

IX

10:29 breathing silence shirt stare sweat
she blankets still she eyes
eyes eyes tears eyes stare separate stare
approach run door run run
scream run leaves sticks stars trip eyes
eyes stare approach scream
blood warm silence 10:32

X

eggs juice coat foggy crowd turnstile wait
train paper push paper push
paper push 5:00 dinner kids noise wife
quiet 10:30 bed grin sleep same

by VAUGHN HAMILTON

The Stranger-Thief

There--in alleys cold heads bend low and
mouths
Lie closed and glued to faces white with
hope that's lost.

Even Words are gone (like children), grown
and foolish in their
Utter darkness, gutter doom, while life
drones on and on and on,

And plastic falseness reigns on thrones of
Stolen pyrite, preciously luring then
thousands of rats.

Fear of the nocturnal thief grips like a
wedge in the oak and
The plastic palace is said to surpass even
Paradise.

And so the face of this earth turns
faceless once more,
And Meaning itself is conquered in the
shadow of the reign.

Then. There comes a figure, lean and tall
with a swinging
Scythe, leveling thrones and razing their
refuge to the level.
But to all's surprise, he comes dressed in
white, bringing
Light with his gaze: A savior and a rest
for a ready few,

But ever the long feared Stranger of all.
The Stranger-Thief.

by VAUGHN HAMILTON

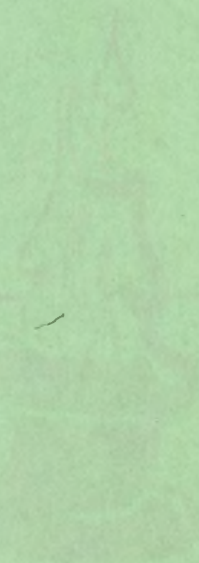
honorable mention



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Staring at Each Other's Shadows
and Nodding Attentively

Silence isn't so much a game now
or a respite or a disguise or an intention
or a failure
as it is a way of life.

Sitting in silent circles in lawn chairs
seems the natural thing to do
on Sunday afternoons
while our shadows mingle in the grass, and
we sit separately,
instinctively nodding
and watching the flickering and fading
and feeling the periodic humming of human
conversation
and nodding --

and wondering
why we'd just as soon sit
and stare at shadows
growing darker
in the three o'clock sun.

by STEVE GEISSEN

Little Jerry Learns His Vowels

Little Jerry doesn't know yet.
He's only five.

Sitting at his desk --
bald, IVs dangling from his arms
like transparent puppet strings --
he works on the alphabet,
coloring the letters in red and green.

Old Mrs. Cole
took some of his blood
and taught him his vowels.
Only, he stopped after E --
it made him sick.
Tomorrow,
they'll have to go back to E
and it'll make him sick again.

Sometimes,
when coloring or dreaming,
he pretends he's free,
but then they take him back
and shoot the light at him,
and he feels the invisible sickness
that only doctors can see.

At naptime he dreamed
he saw a bunch of old nurses
chasing little kids
through a park.

And now he wonders:
If the nurses caught them,
would they make
them
learn E.

by STEVE GEISSEN

AFTER AGONIZING

I don't know how it happened -
but
you did it
once again. . .

Flipped my thoughts
all inside/out
then put my heart on mend.

Love flew d
 o
 w
 n
on wings of Hope
Dark thoughts
lost defense
 new dreams (bright colored
 rainbows)
sparkled
childlike
innocence.

Love's silvered seed
of blessed bliss
 (nurtured by
 your so soft kiss)

sprinkled d
 o
 w
 n
 inside of ME

implanting Happiness.

by SANDRA L. STANLEY

COME, END WINTER

I felt as if I'd known you
somehow,
somewhere, before . . .
that you were always standing
 (just outside my door).

The door
 between
and you
 (without).

Shattered image:
tethered to the wounds of fate
from grief inside; compressed -
myself knew naught but dread
Love withered, evanesced.

Light poured beneath the door
as sunshine filled the crack.
Your hand
reached out and pushed
while I
within
held back.
I cried then tried
to hold the door,
still
you stepped within . . .

The Phoenix came:
kindled memories long dead
from all lost hope, dismay.
Resurrected feelings that I'd
thought long locked, away.

All senses blurred
my heart deferred

my strength could hold no more.
Then I remembered, suddenly
you'd come to me
before.
I'd dreamt our souls mirrored -
integrality,
Eclipsed;
our very selves merged
two
one,
totality.

by SANDRA L. STANLEY

STUFF OF DREAMS

Your
mouth to mine
Our
legs entwined;
The tempest touched, divine.

Each
heart to heart;
Warm
Soul's desire;
Kindled passion's fire.

Then easing down the spiralled high,
we closed our eyes with softened sighs.
While Van Gogh, Christmas-lighted tints
ensorcelled us with wonderment
and . . .

as I turned to gaze at you
(an Adonis, silhouetted view)

I slowly slipped
away
asleep,

with all desires in dreams . . .
Complete.

by SANDRA L. STANLEY

THE FRONT

Leon Jefferson sat alone on the front stoop of the old store watching the ashes of the trash fire rise up out of the old and rusted oil drum. As he examined the black flakes making their way over the rim of the barrel and falling to the ground, there came up from the bottom of the pile of burning rubbish a piece of bright white paper. As it came out of the barrel it seemed to catch a light breeze and Leon watched as it rode up and away from the consuming fire. Using the heat from the fire below it to lift itself, the paper soared up into the evening sky and began to climb over the row of buildings that made up what was called The Front. Just as it had almost cleared the top of the old store, a hot ash from the fire touched itself to the bottom most corner of the paper and set it aflame. Leon stared with idle curiosity as the now burning paper fell slowly back to earth and extinguished itself in the open sewer ditch that ran beside the store.

After watching the fire for a few moments more, Leon decided that it was too hot for such activity and raised himself up to move to the other side of the stoop when he felt a muffled blow to the back of his head.

"I thought I tol' ya nigga kids to stay out from the front o' ma store,"

screamed "Old Granny" as she clouted Leon again with her near strawless broom.

"Now git 'fore I beatcha ta death"

Leon laughed at this last statement, knowing the woman was as fragile as old glass and he could easily kill her with one punch, but he had been considering going to see his buddies anyway so he got up from the stoop and began to make his way down the street.

Leon had lived his whole life on Winston Avenue. He knew every pothole in the street and every run-down building and alleyway like a spider knows his web. Behind him, just past the old store, was his house where he and his mother had lived alone ever since his daddy died in the war in Vietnam. He never had really understood why his father had gone to fight in the War. His father had blamed the government for every bad thing that had happened in his life. But when the draft notice came in the mail, his father just packed his bag and left without even saying goodbye to him and his mama. Six months later when the notice came saying he had been killed his mother took Leon in her arms and said, "Now don' you worry now Leon everythin's gonna be alrigh', the Lord's gonna look out for us ya hea'." Which is what his mother always said to anything that went wrong.

Old Granny's store was a run-down place that had once been a branch of the Kelty's Post Office until about 35 years ago, when Agnes Howles bought it from the bankrupting lumber town and made it into a general store. She had been a strong, proud woman in those days, determined to bring a much needed service to the poor blacks who were left without jobs after the lumber company had closed down and left them to their own in "the front" of the timber land. But, as time went by, running the store alone and giving credit to those who could only pay it back slowly, if at all, had beaten the fiery white woman down to watch the store that looked as though the next light breeze to come through would send it to the ground.

Leon and his friends didn't remember what the old lady had tried to do for their parents and grandparents and treated the woman as a white outsider. They called her "Old Granny" and shamelessly teased and mocked her. Almost nightly they broke into her store and stole cigarettes and candy, and any money the old woman foolishly left in the place. Once they had even tried to burn the store, but the fire was put out before too much damage was done. All they succeeded in doing was stripping the white paint from the store walls and leaving them black with soot.

As Leon made his way down the street past Willy's pool hall and toward "the

barber shop", he was met by one of his buddies, Thomas, who was called "Cutter" by Leon and the rest of the gang because of proficient use of an old switchblade which had been won in a card game.

"Hey Leon, hurry on up," Cutter called excitedly, "some slick fella in a suit is at Junebug's crap game rolling sevens like Jesus hisself. I reckon he done took 'Bug and dem utha' boys for put' near ov'a thousand dolla's already!"

Spurred on by the news of the action, Leon headed full steam toward "the barber shop" with Cutter on his heels like a new puppy.

When they reached the continuous crap game in the back of the old barber shop, they had to force their way through the ever-growing crowd of onlookers to get a look at the game. There at the homemade crap table was a tall onyx man with broad shoulders that looked better than any man Leon had ever seen. His gray suit was business-like and fit him like a tailor-made glove. On each of his fingers was a ring of gold, some set with fine gems that glistened in the fluorescent lights of the old back room like new-fallen rain, and clutched in his huge silky black hand was a wad of bills big enough to fill a quart mason jar. Beside him was Junebug, the man who had run the crap table since before Leon was born. Junebug looked worse than Leon could ever remember. His

splotchy brown brow was beaded with sweat and the half-smoked cigarette in his mouth hung down at almost a ninety degree angle. The hands that usually scooped up the dice with the touch of a professional magician now shook like they were consumed by arthritis.

As Leon watched in fascination, the money in Junebug's hand slowly made its way onto the table to find itself in the hands of the slicker. The slicker never smiled. He rolled the dice with confidence, collected the money he won, and paid the money he lost with the efficiency of a banker. The slicker bet in random fashion, betting a hundred on one roll and ten dollars the next, but always winning the bigger bets. L e o n wished to himself that he had the slicker's luck, could know when to bet the big ones and when to back off.

The contest went on for another hour or so with Junebug occasionally sending a boy into his office to get more money to cover the slicker's bets. Then Leon and the crowd gasped as the slicker laid his wad of money down on the table and placed it on the line. Junebug's eyes bulged from his head and his cigarette dropped from his lip onto the floor. Staring up from the table like a corpse was more money than he made in six months and losing that much would surely put him out of business., "But," Junebug thought, "if I were to win that money I could buy

myself into the big time crap ring in the city and get away from this place."

Junebug reached down inside his pants, up under the crotch of his underwear and pulled out a small envelope. The crowd stared in wonder as he opened it and took from it five worn one thousand dollar bills and placed them beside the slicker's pile. "You're covered," he said through his parched throat. The slicker slowly smiled and nodded.

The crowd erupted as the slicker took the dice from the table and cocked his arm back behind his head and cast the dice onto the table. They caromed off the far end of the table and came up seven. All sound ceased. Lying on the table next to the slicker's coat sleeve was another set of dice. The slicker yanked back his hand as if he had grabbed a hot skillet. Junebug, never taking his eyes from the slicker, picked up the first set of dice and dropped them on the table several times. Each time they landed, the numbers showed seven.

The slicker grabbed at the money and tried to bolt but was yanked off his feet because Junebug's knife had pinned his hand to the table. As he stumbled the mob was on him like a pack of hungry wolves, ripping at his fine suit and pummeling him mercilessly.

Leon leaped onto the table. The money had already been scooped up but the rings of gold were still on the pierced hand fastened to the table. Leon tugged at the largest and freed it just as the table gave way with the fury of the mob. Leon rolled across the floor and scrambled for the door. Looking back into the throng he saw Cutter's switchblade rise and fall with swift staccato movements. Then Leon turned and bolted into the night.

He ran across the street and into the dark alleyways he knew so well and slowly made his way to Willy's Pool Hall where his friends all hung out at night to sell dope to the city kids and plot their next exploit.

He waited in the side alley for a few minutes to catch his breath and to let his heart slow down. He tapped his trouser pocket one time to assure himself that the ring was still where he'd put it and headed into the front door of Willy's.

As he walked in, he could hear Cutter in the middle of a gang of guys loudly proclaiming the events that had just transpired. Leon pushed his way up to Cutter and sat on the edge of the worn-out, old pool table that gave Willy's its name. Cutter was just telling how he had caught the slicker cheating and had cut his throat just so, when Leon sat down. Leon just gave a slight nod, letting

Cutter know that he would back up whatever he said, but was relieved when Cutter did not mention the ring he had stolen. "Maybe," he hoped, "no one saw me take it." Finally after a chorus of "no shits" and "you a damn lie's" and various speculations on where the slicker came from and where the body would be disposed of, the tale ended.

Leon could tell by the look in their eyes and the way they held their bodies that the band had been excited by the bloody story and was ready for action. Leon coolly lit a cigarette and surveyed his hungry pack.

"Well whatcha'll want to do tonight?" he asked, knowing what the answer would be.

"Let's go get Old Granny's place," suggested one of them.

"Yeah," said another, "we ain't got her in over a week."

Having agreed to the safe and sure job of robbing Old Granny's, all that was left to do was wait until the night deepened and The Front was quiet. Needing no plan, they killed time by playing pool and fighting among themselves.

When the time came, tension hung in the air. Even though they had done this countless times before, each time seemed

like a new adventure to them.

Leon led the gang back down into the alley and around behind the pool hall to the back of the store. On one corner of the building was a hole in the wall which had been patched after every break-in but had never been able to stop the determined boys from getting to their goal. This time seemed especially easy as Leon and some others kicked at the old boards.

In they went in their usual order with Leon in the lead and Cutter staying outside to watch for trouble. As the last boy entered the gap, every light in the old store came to life and, as the gang tried to make their way back out, Agnes Howles appeared beside them, revolver in hand. Leon pushed the group toward the hole as the gun went off, and he almost vomited as the boy's head in front of him burst like a ripe melon. Agnes, thrown to the floor by the recoil of the gun, was regaining her feet when Leon's fist bashed her full in the face. She slumped to the ground motionless. Leon once again made for the gap.

Reaching the outside, he saw the last of the boys running through the dark alley, headed out toward the woods where they met after robbing Old Granny's. Leon ran for the second time that night to the safety of the darkness but was met at the edge of the last building by a sharp pain in his stomach. Looking down he saw the

hand of Cutter holding the handle of the old switchblade. Deep in his bowels was the blade. He could not bring himself to look up at his friend but stared at Cutter's free hand as it delved into his pocket to emerge with the gold ring taken from the slicker.

As Leon lay in the dirt, he could hear Cutter running into the woods yelling "Ol' Granny done kilt Leon, Ol' Granny done kilt Leon." He clutched his stomach for a moment and laughed to himself as he remembered his mother's ever-comforting words, "Now don' you worry now Leon everythin's gonna be alrigh', the Lord's gonna look out for us ya hea'."

by EDWARD SHELTON

REQUIEM

CHALLENGER: JANUARY 28, 1986

Rise on the wings of the morning,
and mount to the sky in the golden glare
of the morning sun.

The world below and the universe beyond is
your legacy,

and the ashes of man's folly
your epitaph.

A new day will dawn in the meantime;
the mourning will pass into memory, legend
and song.

The children of your dreams will follow
you

in your flight toward the stars
and history.

Take care not to shackle their minds with
superstition,

or bind their spirits in chains of
ignorance, myth, and fear.

The quest for knowledge is man's
salvation,

and you have paved the way for them to
challenge

the unknown.

They slave for us all in the mines of
learning;

your children will build your monument on
the doorsteps of Earth and Moon.

They will look outward from their lofty
vantage point and see

the shape of all those things which are
yet to come.

A thousand thousand suns will ride the
ebony ride to meet them,

and a thousand places as dear as the one
they leave.

They will find a home for us among these
other places,

some will say by the will of God, but far
more likely by the sweat

of man.

They will take no heed of the things they
leave behind them,

the remains of the civilization which gave
them birth.

These hold no charm for those who seek
tomorrow;

and those who seek it not deserve to be
left on Earth.

You did not live to see this, their
achievement;

and yet you live in all those yet to come.

Your immortality lies in those who follow
along the path that will one day lead
us home.

You gave us the challenge to find that
home in the starlight,

you threw us a torch that you lit in your
funeral pyre.

The children of man will follow along in
your footsteps

down the path that leads to your hopes and
your desires.

The Hymn of Challenger rises toward the
heavens

with air and land and sea to take its
place.

This ancient Naval Hymn we sing with words
made new for you and yours.

O Lord, we pray thee grant thy grace to
those who venture

into space.

So rise on the wings of the morning,

and mount to the skies in the glare of the
morning sun.

We rise, the quest for knowledge our
destination,

knowing that most of the race is yet

to run.

by JAMES L. CHORON

DEDALUS

The Proposed Permanent Space Habitat

In mankind's youth I strove for the
sky on waxen wings of fancy,
brought to life by man's eternal
aspirations for things above,
the product of some nameless bard
of another age.

In realms of glory, soon I'll sit
upon an axis
looking down upon the sons of those
who gave me life,
and from my bowels those same
descendants shall gaze upon the stars.

For I shall climb toward the heavens
on wings of steel,
discarding wings of wax, carried by
man to the place that myth and legend gave
to me.
I shall be a guiding light, a beacon
pointing the way to newer dreams.

In days to come the sons of man
will look on me
as I swing in majesty and might
around their ancestral home,
and dream their dreams that yet are
unfulfilled,
the stuff of myths and legends yet to
come.

by JAMES L. CHORON

SOLDIER, COME

When princes, powers and
principalities cannot content themselves
with what they now possess,
and when the time has passed for
peaceful talk,
they come to me with open arms and say
Soldier, come.

When states and nations rise in
righteous wrath
against a multitude of ills both
great and small,
real and imagined ills that the sword
must put to right,
they greet me like a son and then
they say
Soldier, come.

The right and wrong and reason of it
all
is only known by those who plan the
strife.
I seldom know the reason when they
call,
and yet I still must answer when they
say
Soldier, come.

In the game of nations, I am just a
pawn.
My life means less than nothing in
the end.
Used, abused and hated more than all

the self-important kings who call and say
Soldier, come.

I understand the reason for my trade
the kings and princes would not muss their
hands;
They have a loathing for the blood of
those
they would destroy and so they call to me,
Soldier, come.

For all of this I take the credit and
the blame:
mine will be the scorn and ridicule.
I see the faces of the ones I've slain,
and stand revolted
by the deeds I've done, and pray for
death's
dark angel's chilling call
Soldier, come.

Unmourned, unloved, forgotten, people
turn
their faces from the one who earns
his keep with blood.
Yet from the dawn of time I've always
stood
alone defending those who call to me
Soldier, come.

by JAMES L. CHORON

There Are Those Times

There are those times I long for more than
fewer hours and higher pay, where none
could bring me more success than to find
those friends who feel this way--

 those friends whose faces tell
 if not my name,
those friends whose faces tell
they feel the same,
where on some road back to our homes
 we could return
 and not alone,
where each would learn
the other's goal--
where down a homeward lane we'd walk
 and speak of things
 in memory talk,
and lend our dreams
when doubters balk.

There are those times I need escape,
when from these crowded city streets
I long for roads that wind away
and so would lead me to my home--

 that soft spoken place
 I call my own,
where oak trees age
and sea waters foam,
and give me all that I have known--
 a place of safety
 and of children grown,
a haven for him
who would need a home--
 some slow and silent place
 where I could lay my soul

and dream of days
I spent alone.
There are those times I think of him--
The child I was when I was young.
There are those times I look for words
to turn his head and catch his eyes--
 those easy browns
 I knew him by,
where I had found
a place to hide,
where way back when in times of tears
 I let go those drops
 that no one hears--
a fit of sobs
which my memory fears,
where down the docks with barnacle beams
 I saw him seek
 his better dreams,
where youth and age would meet,
those strange, yet old extremes.

There are those times of heave and sway,
where waters roll to ocean time
and beat against the shore at dawn,
where I would feel in foaming surf
 the coastal sand
 of tiding earth,
where I would stand
in liquid turf
and greet the sun with sleepy eyes,
 and I would wait
 without surprise
to watch it range
across the skies,
where down a beach
of salty shell,

my hands would reach
beneath the swell
and search for all that sailors tell.

by ANDERSON KELLY

The Boys of Time

The eldest lad of May,
The youngest boy of June--
How well these children play
Their ranging, changing tune.

The May-lad's day near done,
He still will play and prance;
What carefree fun
His winning, spinning dance.

But the June-boy wants his way
And the May-lad moves along,
Leaves the boy of sun to play
His younger, summer song.

Yet the June-boy when alone is sad,
As he waits for all the moon
To share with the May-day lad
Their ranging, changing tune.

* * * * *

The eldest boy of June,
The newest lad of young July--
How well their ranging, changing tune
They play for you and I.

by ANDERSON KELLY

The Canvas

There was such a sale at my garage
And much was there to see;
Of all the things I had for sale
Just one held wealth for me.

It was a canvas framed by wood
That showed its facing blank;
It wanted only for a brush
And then for someone's paint.

A man in faith said he would take
What no one else would buy;
He took away the canvas free
And went to paint his life.

He stroked the canvas with his brush
And stained the virgin white;
He started off his greatest work
By painting morning light.

He painted all his younger years
His joys, his hopes and strife;
He brushed with care a loving face
For now he brushed his wife.

He brushed her hair and eyes with brown;
Her lips he painted red.
He styled her heart with every hue
From rainbows overhead.

He brushed his children young and weak;
He brushed them fully grown.
He painted children on his knee
When his had borne their own.

The canvas soon was filled with paint,
With life and all its cheers,
And with the space remaining white
He dotted with his tears.

He painted gray his aging hair
That flowed like ocean waves;
He brushed his home that looked upon
A row of family graves.

He finished off his greatest work
By painting small a cross,
And with his final stroke he died,
An artist ever lost.

This man in faith had made a will
And left the frame to me.
I tore the wrapping from the frame:
But there was none to see.

He left a note in which he wrote:
"My son, since life is art,
Draw here the scenes that tell your dreams
And paint them from your heart."

* * * * *

There is a sale at my garage
And much is there to see;
Of all the things I have for sale
Just one holds wealth for me.

by ANDERSON KELLY

first day of that texas summer

village slumbers,
blanketed by her hill-bitten forest.
sun peeks over wind,
casting a shadow sideways to the pond.
water, chocolated by mud,
sways north to south.
down the dusty, graveled road
a smith, the first of the morning,
scratches his matted hair, lifts the hoof,
draws a stake, bends, and hammers
the first day of that texas summer,
nineteen-thirty-six.
sometimes a rainbow
and chivalry sing to a pilfered flower
posted on a sidewalk lamp post.
but the suicide queen jangles to a new
death star.

and her incessant window
throws shadows my way.

but no peasants mark time by the rich man.
power is a singular sensation
marked by compromise and deceit.

so cut my throat and bleed me
to a graveyard where rocks, dirt remember
who is here.

recall me not to a new generation
but remind them that sometimes a rainbow. . .
yellow dogs suffocate, barking to moors
throat-choking clouds keep children
grandmothers in for the day

but men, earners of little, drinkers of
much,

carouse

kidnapping short moments of adulterous
freedom

while their women
saddled and hooved
bend to earth callous to clouds or milky
ways.

by ANDREW J. URBANUS

Proserpina's Lament

Beauty wears a crown of golden yellow
hair.

Eclipsing suns, she shines so wondrous
fair.

In fields of green we dance to poet's pen,
taste summer's dusk in a time so soon to
end.

I asked what to do
when missing became mourning.

Leaden-lined clouds forsook
summer's green.

Smells of summer's blossoms died
on the branch.

She answered.

I'll see you next week.

I murmur

I'll miss you.

I'm waiting for the day
when time will draw her near

My hell is her delay.

And frozen crystal tears.

by GORDON GARRETT CONNER

No Apologies

When I consider all that we have done;
those things that Wyrd will not permit
again
to dance and sing beneath a setting sun
and chase the waves of heather 'cross the
fen,
tasting nocturnal air on forest's floor
and shouting with the wind in highland
vales,
of wand'ring far through fierce and sudden
gales,
I can come home to rest my wearied head
and think of things that life no longer
gives.
Oh, to that warm security, our bed
'til time's gold sand leaks out the
crystal sieve.
For we have tasted all that life contains.
All fears have died and only love remains.

by GORDON GARRETT CONNER

Silent Tornado

I dipped my eye upward into her skull
to find god's mother weeping on a back
porch,
watching a windchime and thinking about
animals
in the street.

A parade began.

As wingless streamers drifted in
the breeze,

young children waving ribbons

came running with brown dogs
barking

at the heels of scuffed sunday
shoes.

The wind.

A crowd of eyes, stupefied and
gaping

grapelike gathered on a wineless
vine

as the twister tiptoed whispering
into town

leaving only the fragrance of
their souls behind.

Silence.

I looked down,

put my hand into her blue purse of
mysteries

as clouds and blistered blackbirds

hovered above the settling dust.

by JAMES CHIONSINI, JR.

Dark Meetings

With dusty overcoats and grey shaveless
cheeks

some took their turns and others their
seats.

Behind the podium one at a time

they stood reciting line after line after
line of

somewhat unplanned prose, spontaneous
sublime

to the multitudes who stared

like a vacant pair of dusty spectacles

in the corner over there

atop an unread shelf of books and cobwebs.

At the conclusion of each speech

applause rifled out

like five typewriters

clapping blackly away

in the blind back
of an unlit room.

by JAMES CHIONSINI, JR.

Words to Write

I would write, but oh how my pen does fail
to move with boldness straight across the
page.

Words to write, yet lines refuse to reveal
what's hidden in the cluttered passage
of my thoughts. There are none I would
conceal,

nor is there one that should cause you
alarm.

Yet, with child-like stammering hand, I
seek

to tell you how I want to feel your warm
embrace; to hear words only hearts can
speak;

to know the ecstasy that Love does bring
to those who are willing to take the
chance.

I feel a presence within me stirring
and the spirit inside me leaps in dance.

I would write, but oh how my pen does
fail.

by PAUL M. THOMASON

A Memory Passage

Dedicated to "Daddy" Jack Dill

There it was, that old familiar package,
looming out at me from years long gone by.

Red and Green, Stop and Go, a memory
passage

to smell of Half and Half and his bright
eyes.

His skin, like a dried creekbed, burnt and
weathered

from years behind a plow of endless toil.

Yet, during those times we were knitted
together,

me and Daddy Jack. How his tales and
smoke together would coil

till they became a vivid part of my
dreams,

so real and lasting that the years can't
claim

to dim my memory of D. J. and his tales of
schemes

from a boyhood long past. Now, all that
remains

is the pain of a last farewell to that old
sage

and my memories of his years spent in
toil;

his seemingly weather-eroded visage;

that can of WD-40, his joints needed the
oil,

always nearby if I should have need of it.

"Gear-and-teed to cure all aches and
pains." he'd say.

For me the only pain that remains is
loneliness.

Memories are all that are left to me of D. J.

Yes, there it was, that old familiar
package,

looming out at me from years long gone by
and amid my memories, silently I cry.

by PAUL M. THOMASON

SCARS

The fading nickel-sized one on my right
knee and its wrinkled partner on my
right elbow from that pseudo-fatal
fourth-grade fall on the St.
Christopher's fire escape.

The long, feathered sort on the inside of
my arm from that casual embrace with
a cotton-tempered iron on the counter.

The short, fat married couple on my left
shin that arose after a losing fight
with several armed thorns.

Plenty of scars rest shallow on my skin.
But yours, my love, with its
blackened imprints, is buried deep.

by CAROL MCBRAYER

THE WICKS WILL SEE

She edged her bed with bright red
candlesticks
that stood inside their brass upon the
floor.
The orange-blue flickers kept her eyes
transfixed,
while nothing could come through the
bolted door.
Two ironed sheets that she had used for
years
lay smoothly on her legs and on her
breasts.
They had upon them dull red lipstick
smears,
thus forged from screams and dull but hard
protests.
Her breath was silent now, her pulse was
loud.
She'd come to let the wilder spirits
loose,
the ones that poked her skin and drew a
crowd
when she'd refuse to let them all seduce.
With all set free, the fantasies
would flow.
The candles, down to flames, released
their glow.

by CAROL MCBRAYER

Real Women

Look hungry in the grocery line
like the ones in the store
where I work.
Ethiopian women
who wear long purple cotton dresses
and white scarves on their heads.
Women who do not use blue
eyeshadow or shampoo with
Vidal Sassoon.
Women whose only decoration
is a tattooed green turquoise
cross on their forehead and
an earring or two.
Women who wear saris.
Women from Guatemala
I see in Perry's laundromat.
Laotians in long red batik
skirts with tiny cocoa brown
bodies and piercing eyes.
Women suckling their dark
bodied children on the steps
of Fitzugh and Carroll Street.
Real women out in the sun
and the heat.

by JESSICA ANTON