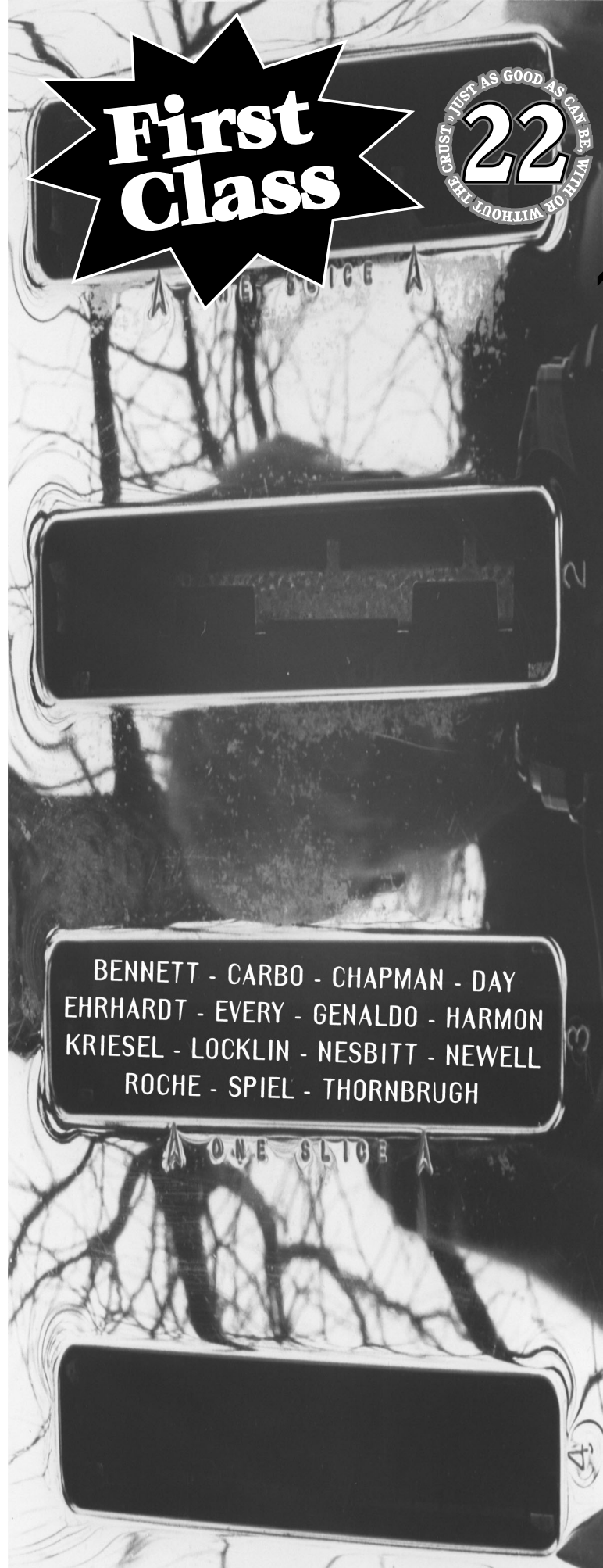


*...for a killer mix of short fiction
and poetics – compiled with finely
honed editorial acumen – it's hard
to find a better mag to wedge in
your back pocket...*





ISSUE TWENTY-TWO
NOVEMBER, 2003

NOTICE!

DUE TO TYPEFACES EVOLVING, THIS DIGITAL VERSIONS OF FIRST CLASS HAS A DIFFERENT APPEARANCE THAN THE ORIGINAL LAYOUT AND DESIGN, AS TYPEFACES HAVE BEEN REPLACED WITH SOMEWHAT SIMILAR FONTS. SO, IF YOU WANT AN AUTHENTIC ORIGINAL, CONTACT ME AT christopherm@four-sep.com. ALSO NOTE THAT THE BELOW ADDRESS NO LONGER EXISTS.

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Illustrations by Stepan Chapman: pp. 13 & 30
Cover Art by Christopher M

First Class #22 contains is a stewing cauldron of stories and moments that urgently depict life as it is today and may be tomorrow if we as humans abandon sense and sensibility. These beautiful words bespeak horrific consequences of actions in our midst. What is important to you? Religion? Aesthetics? Common Sense? What is vital to the human condition? Conflict? Self-preservation? Equality? Not sure myself, but the poetics and short fiction contained herein are certainly food for thought. And that's what damn good writing is, after all – a cause for reflection, a snap of a synapse or two.

Again, I am pleased that your eyes are on these pages.

- Christopher M.

Bold-flavored coffee. Ringing bells. Sunday morning. Searching for clues. A tremor in the ground beneath me. A ripple in a far-off ocean. Shreds of respite in a slaughtered landscape. Parked on a hill with an overview. Fighting demons that have pseudo names cooked up in clinics I won't bow down to.

Life is suffering. Package it right and you've got a wellness industry. Put up a shingle and rake in the cash. The beat goes on.

The dog in the back seat is panting for no apparent reason. There's a half moon high in the heat-blistered morning sky. It took all I had in me to roll a cigarette and buy a cup of coffee to lug up here.

An idiot with a camera with a foot-long telescopic lens just pulled in beside me. There's 300 yards of empty road along this high ground, and this is where he chooses to park. He springs from his car and brings the camera up in front of his face. Pans and clicks, pans and clicks. Jumps back in the car and races off.

This, then, is the problem. The hydra-headed monster. The disjointed teemingness of it all. Flags flapping in the breeze, tanks rolling through the desert, Dr. Seuss on the silver screen, crash-bang and profane, the movie rights to magic sold to the highest bidder. Nothing is sacred. We butcher our children and fling them into Moloch's bone-crunching maw with such demented frenzy it won't even wash as sacrificial.

Do Not Go Softly Into That Dark Night

John Bennett

The point is you start here and you get there. Then you turn around and head back again. Along the way you pick things up. Like lice and laryngitis and loneliness. Don't let this slow you down. Even if the Big C strikes, keep on truckin'. Even if your ass falls off. All around you all along the way there are circus tents and treachery. Try to act natural, keep moving.

Somewhere around the sixth turn-around your shoes will wear out – this is when you notice the pebbles and the broken glass. The connection's hard to pin down, but this is also when you begin noticing the moaning and the rustling in the bushes. Don't hesitate, keep moving.

If you keep it up long enough, you'll matriculate. A big word, I know, for such a simple story, but flip that tassel and keep moving.

There's no moral to this story, no happy ending. It's as simple as a broken heart. Motion is the only truth.

Everything, Always Into the Past

Joey Carbo

I had always pitied my father his bomb shelter. It appeared to me as something only a weak and very frightened man would have. A man who was afraid to let life be exactly what it was. A man afraid to die.

But my father was dead now. He had died two days before of starvation. We'd rolled his body into a corner and covered it with rags and garbage. The smell was horrible. The rest of us (my mother, sister and grandfather) just lay around and starved and wondered. Wondered what waited for us outside. In two days it would be considered mostly safe for us to swing open the doors of the shelter and go out into the world we had run from. We didn't expect much. We had a battery operated radio and it picked up nothing from the outside. No news – no life; we thought. I didn't know if it was possible for the makers of the news to broadcast from inside bomb shelters, but I certainly would not have put it past them. And if one network had an in-shelter studio, then all the others would certainly have them. They'd fight for our ears as we fought for our lives. They'd broadcast recipes for eating duct tape and we'd try desperately to eat the shit!

But no news came. We were sure the world was mostly empty. Before we lost radio our government had bombed several countries and we'd taken two major hits, one on each coast.

“What do you think we'll find out there?” my sister, Mary asked me. “Well, this is D.C., a sure target. We already know at least one bomb was dropped here.”

“Do you think they destroyed the White House?” She asked, her eyes beaming with excitement.

“Come on, Mary. The White House is gone.”

Mary had always been fixated on power. Mostly on the government's power. She always bought magazines like *Time* and *Money* to look at pictures of politicians and businessmen. She watched the news religiously, but knew nothing of current affairs. Now she was fifteen and the fixation had, if anything, strengthened.

“The White House is standing,” my grandfather said proudly. “You kids will see, everything will be fine.”

I hated my grandfather's pride more than I hated my father's fear. Everything would not be fine. My eyes scanned the pile of rags and garbage that covered my father's corpse. Everything was not fine.

I awoke to my sister talking in her sleep. I nudged her and she sprang from a nightmare. I rolled over and stared up at the ceiling. We'd be going out there soon. I really didn't know if there was anything to look forward to, but I welcomed a change of scenery. I closed my eyes and a picture flashed into my mind: a pile of wood and bricks, and emerging from beneath the rubble, a door.

“Mary, if the house has been blown down then the door to the bomb shelter should be clearly visible to anyone who would be out there.”

“No one is out there yet because it’s not safe to leave the shelters until tomorrow.”

“Oh... yeah.”

“Do we have anything left to eat?”

“Mary, you know we have nothing left to eat.”

Why did she have to ask me that? I thought back to the day we went into the shelter. I still couldn’t believe it. After all the preparation, all the worrying, and the one thing the old man didn’t put into the shelter was enough food. Almost served him right to die guilty and starving like he did. Here we were surrounded by flashlights, batteries, water, Aspirin, bandages of every conceivable shape, shovels, blankets, soap – anything the coward could imagine packing away in this death hole – and we had only one lousy box of canned foods. It was the box he had started with, and then he had moved on to other supplies and always meant to go back and finish packing in food. We had been forced into the shelter so quickly that there was no time to think of things he might have forgotten. It seemed like the bombs had begun falling almost as soon as we had closed the door. When he realized his mistake he wished he was dead. It was the worst I had ever seen him. He refused to eat any of the food we did have there. We begged him to eat something; we worked out plans to make the food last. He wouldn’t touch a bite. He just cried and begged us to forgive him. We said we did, but inside we all hated him. Especially me. I opted to stay above and die if it was time to die. I preferred it to living in some destroyed after-world and I certainly preferred it to starving to death in a metal box. I cursed him and attacked him. My grandfather pulled me off and begged me to forgive my father. Eventually I said that I forgave him; I really did want him to forgive himself. The stupid bastard!

We all slept a lot the last day. We’d been without food for almost four days and our last meal had been green beans, one can between the four of us.

I was still sleeping when my grandfather opened the door. The light was brutal, not as I remembered it. I sprang to my feet immediately. I had a feeling that he should shut the door. I was terrified.

“Come on everyone! There’s food out there. America is out there!” he said, trying to sound brave.

I pushed past the old man and staggered into the blinding abyss. I rubbed my eyes but they would not adjust. I saw only blinding white staring back at me. I rubbed and rubbed, but over and over blinding white.

When I realized why the blinding white would not go away, why my eyes would not adjust, it broke my heart. It wasn’t my eyes at all. It was the landscape. There was nothing to see. For miles in any direction,

nothing. I fell to my knees and wept like a child. My mother and sister came out behind me holding my grandfather's hand. Soon they saw it too and we wept in a pile on the ground.

After only twenty minutes outside on our first day of freedom we were back inside the shelter without a thing to eat. It was decided that I would go out walking to look for food, people, anything. The others would wait. I had made a flagpole of a red rag so that I could find my way back to our hole. I was certain I wouldn't be using it; I planned to walk until I dropped from starvation and died.

I took a half-gallon of water and kissed my mother good-bye.

As I walked I tried to imagine our city as it had been, tried to make out streets or get a sense of direction. It was impossible. I was walking blind. Walking into Hell. I wanted to walk toward the center of down-

town, where other people might have had shelters. No one on our street would have had a shelter under their home like my father did. They were all dead. The lucky ones were dead. Our shelter door had been just as I had imagined it. Only it seemed more a beacon of hate than anything else. It just lay there alone on the ground. No trace of our home above. It was the door to a prison, a prison we had gone into voluntarily and that my father would never come out of in the blinding white all around me only this red, angry door stood alone. A token of the hate that had consumed me inside that metal box that my father had built for our safety. I scanned the ground for other doors. I saw only bits of rock, ash, twisted fragments of steel, and dust. Mostly I saw dust. Miles and miles of white dust. If this was safety I wanted none of it.

"Helloooo! Helloooo?"

I almost jumped out of my skin. I spun around, but saw nothing. I was losing my mind. I turned back in my original direction to continue walking and there he stood. I was sure I was dreaming.

"Are you alone?" he asked me.

I couldn't speak, after expecting to find no one; hoping to find anyone. Then to find him! What could I say to him anyway?

"Are you alone?"

"My... uh. Family."

I WAS GOING BACK TO
MY FATHER'S BOMB
SHELTER WITH THE
PRESIDENT OF THE
UNITED STATES
HOLDING MY ARM.

“You don’t look good. Take me to your family.”

“Food... we...”

“It’s okay, there are others and we have food. Lead the way to your family.” I began walking back the way I had come, toward the still visible red rag flag with him holding my arm. I was going back to my father’s bomb shelter with the President of the United States holding my arm.

My strength was returning with every bite. My mother hadn’t stopped crying since I’d gone back to get her. My grandfather was still talking to the President and he was, for the third time, telling the account of the invasion on the White House bomb shelter and his narrow escape. To think, the shit finally hits the fan and the President is being kept in a shelter just under the White House. I guess it’s the last place you’d expect. But, they had expected it and the President was himself the only government official he knew of to be alive in this area. He had fled the White House shelter two days ago and found safety with a small group of families. They were living in a large community shelter and had enough food for months. The leader of the group seemed not to be the President, but a man named Jarod. He spoke for the group and he said when it was time to eat. The President, in turn, entertained with talk and kept an eye on everyone.

Within a few days curtains were being hung and sections of the shelter were being divided among the people: a kitchen, sleeping areas... We all listened to the silent radios hoping something would break through. Tools were being gathered and Jarod had sacks of seeds; we hoped the soil would grow food.

“I’ll set my office up here and I’ll begin planning for our new lives,” the President told Jarod.

“In case you haven’t noticed William, there ain’t no United States and you ain’t no fucking body,” Jarod yelled, then walked away.

“You can’t address him by his first name,” my grandfather told Jarod.

“You better wake up old man!”

Jarod took a shovel and left the shelter. I grabbed a shovel and followed him. “Things were never worth a fuck the way they were before anyhow,” Jarod told me as we walked. “I’m sorry all those people died but that sorry rich-man sack of shit is crazy if he thinks things will ever be the way they were before.” I didn’t answer, I just followed him into the blinding white.

Jarod stopped walking and stabbed his shovel into the ground.

“Hell man, this is what some people have dreamed of all their lives! I’m not saying me, but some people.”

He stomped his shovel and started digging.

“Make an even row, that way,” he said gently and pointed to the ground in front of his shovel.

I dug where he said, following his lead.

“And why are we digging alone?” Jarod yelled.

I shrugged.

“More than fifty men back there and two of us are planting seeds! Those goddamned cowards couldn’t grab their asses with both hands unless the television told them how! Take away the television and the motherfuckers are useless! But when the plants grow they’ll be there to eat! They’ll sign up for a useless job and slave their lives away to eat so long as they don’t have to plant the seeds! I could be the world’s new dictator, just because I’ve got a shovel!” I liked Jarod. I became angry at everyone left alive. If this thing had been better planned only the decent members of our society would have been saved. My grandfather would have been dusted, maybe my mother, my sister, probably me. But you couldn’t think selfishly; you were of no more importance than the seeds you planted. It was how you chose to grow that determined if you were stomped out or allowed to flower.

My father had worked for the city. He was a bookkeeper. Every year, at Christmas, the city erected a seven hundred dollar tree downtown. Homeless people slept under it. The cops would wake them up and shove them down the streets every morning. My father was proud of the tree and resented the homeless for sleeping there. I hated his logic and wished he would choke to death every time he recounted the story. “Another bunch of transients were under the tree this morning,” he’d say. I don’t think he knew what a transient was, he had just heard it on the news. He had no idea that those people were the local homeless, his neighbors with nowhere to go.

As the days went on Jarod became stronger and stronger. Eventually, the men would agree to let him breed their daughters just to assure their families a substantial amount of the coming harvest.

“I don’t even know if the shit is going to grow yet and these fuckers are giving up their first-born and their virgin daughters just to get a promise of a plate full of food.”

“Are you going to repopulate the world,” I asked, “like the President says we should do?”

“Fuck if I care. I’m breeding left and right! Any children I make are doomed to fall under some sort of law of the land as soon as the land is rich enough in resource for someone to want it. And stop calling him President!”

“But, we’ll soon be starving again,” I say.

“You’ll see,” Jarod said. “The second these crops produce they will gather a militia and claim control of the fields, then set up a list of rules for everyone to follow if they want to eat. Two thousand years from now people will bow down and weep to the set of rules these bums write down. And none of it will mean diddly shit! But, because it’s old it will seem important.”

I left the fields that day feeling lower than I'd ever felt. I was the same as the aphids that would come to eat our lettuce. We were all a plague for others to rid themselves of. I came to the community shelter and all that waited for me was that red, angry door. Exactly like the one my father had led us into. That metal box prison of ours and it was the only escape from the spreading white sea of dust outside. I cranked back the angry door. The barrage of curtains unfolded before me. Families did their best at privacy, everyday I watched mothers bathe children in large tubs. I watched fathers scratching their balls – nowhere to go, nothing to do. There were no recliners to lie in, no tool sheds to hide in. These men were truly mice when forced to face their families. They had no great wisdom to offer, no nuts to crack. They weren't even digging to plant seeds. They couldn't prove that they cared any more now than they did before.

I found my family's curtain and flipped it back. Mary sat there with a year old copy of *People* in her lap.

"The President came by today. He has a plan, you know."

"Apparently his plan doesn't include food. The motherfucker hasn't planted a single seed. And stop calling him the President; there's nothing left for him to be president of!"

"I think his plan is amazing. Families will be moved up in judgment rank as they acquire more crop share. Soon, order will be restored with the top ranking families voting for –"

"How is that any different than what we had before?"

"What was wrong with what we had before?"

"Are you retarded? Haven't you noticed that Jarod and me are the only ones working the crops?"

"So I guess you want to be king!"

"No, we just want to eat! We expect to get hungry soon! Where are you keeping your brain?"

She turned her back on me and stuck her head in her magazine. I stormed out, shoved the curtain aside and went looking for Jarod.

"The fucker is going around making plans to rule the world again."

"What," Jarod asked, "are you talking about?"

"The old president, he's going around talking about crop share and judgment families and the whole thing sounds like some goddamned White House address!"

"Don't worry about that. Listen, all of these families are suburban families. And who's he got to talk to? Fifty or sixty families! Do you know how many community shelters like this one were filled when the bombs started to fall? The working man and the poor will never let things go back to the way they were. What's he going to rule? Murder is no crime. Not anymore. I'll strangle

that fucker before I let him tell me I have to pay taxes to build bombs while the schools have no books.”

“It’s all too scary.”

“You worry too much. It was scary before! Now, it’s beautiful! Don’t you see, it’s all here for us now. We make the first move! We decide! We live in the world we want!”

“What if the crops don’t grow?”

“We cannibalize.”

My heart sunk. I was afraid of Jarod for the first time. He was talking about killing the old president and eating him, or maybe someone else. He had been screwing girls in the shelter that were half his age. He didn’t care about us.

“Come on,” he said, “I want to show you something.”

I followed him for what seemed like days across the white disarray that we used to call America. I wondered about other countries. I wondered who was out there. The world felt bigger than it had ever felt before.

We came to a pile of metal debris: twisted arches of leftover buildings, broken concrete...

“The bombs didn’t hit so hard here,” Jarod said.

We walked through the rubble. He shoved things aside and folded back a dirty canvas.

“I found it a few days ago. It’s going to save us.

I couldn’t believe my eyes. I rubbed them and the white dust that clung to my fingers burned my eyes and my blisters from the shovel. My jaw dropped. Jarod smiled. He just smiled and patted the hood of the car he had found.

The next morning came like a shot in the head. A familiar voice boomed through dusty speakers. I pushed my blanket away and put my feet on the concrete floor. That’s when Jarod burst through the curtain.

“Get up! Come on!”

“What’s going on?”

“These lazy bastards want to ration out the crops according to some made up rank schedule.”

“It’s not made up,” Mary groaned as she pulled the blankets up over her head, “it’s been going on all week. Families have been qualifying for rank according to the number of healthy male offspring and fertile female offspring.”

“Why didn’t we know about this?”

“We’ve been too busy planting the food for them to fight over,” Jarod yelled. He turned to leave and I jumped up and followed him. We left the shelter and the President could barely be heard over the loud generator that was supposed to be used only for emergencies. It was burning precious fuel just to amplify his voice for less than two hundred people.

“Why does that old hump always have to masturbate to an audience?” Jarod screamed. “Everything he is saying is useless!”

He was going to the old car he’d found. I followed him.

“Will it start?”

“Sure it will. I’ve started it a few times. I’m getting the fuck out of here!”

“I’m going back to get my sister,” I said.

“Okay, I understand. But, I don’t think she’ll want to leave. Be back here in twenty minutes or I’m gone,” he screamed as he loaded jugs of gasoline into the trunk of the dusty car.

THESE MEN – SO
RELUCTANT TO DIG
AND PLANT SEEDS
– CAME FLOODING
THROUGH THE DOOR

I ran as fast as I could. I knew the way back easily. I didn’t care what she said. I’d drag her back if I had to.

I cranked back the angry door of the shelter and shoved my way inside. The families were just coming in from the speech. I pushed my way through to our curtain and drew it aside.

There, on the concrete floor of our rationed space, lied my sister, and on top of her the President. He was humping away and she was screaming. Her clothes lay in shreds all around them.

I couldn’t think. All went black. I picked up the closest thing, a rusty canteen, and struck him in the head. I hit him over and over and the blood soaked my forearms, my chest and face. Mary lay screaming beneath the President as he rolled over and *-thud!* hit the floor.

His broken smile stared up at me.

“What have you done?!” Mary shrieked.

“He was raping you!”

She just cried and cried, rolling there naked on the rationed concrete floor space.

I left the shelter, nowhere to run.

Jarod was waiting for me and Mary just up ahead in his dusty car.

Nothing waited for me and Mary back at the shelter.

I just dropped into the white dust and cried into my hands. I cried for what seemed like hours and I thought nothing would stir me. I thought I might cry until I dehydrated and died, like the old song said.

Then, something did stir me. Men from the shelter came charging from the angry door, calling for me with sticks in their hands. These men – so reluctant to dig and plant seeds – came flooding through the door – now full of energy – to have my head, to see justice through, to punish me for the violence I had done.

I lay there in the dust with the men behind me charging to take my life, and up from the insurmountable white sheet came a low roar, a roar distinctly familiar to us all. The charging enforcers of a law long dead stopped in their tracks. They dropped their sticks and looked up in amazement as Jarod sped by in his car, a dead remnant from their distant past; a promise of garbage to come. They stood stiff with jaws dropped the way I had when he'd shown it to me.

Our old lives were so far away. I knew how they felt. They wanted to cling to anything that resembled the past. That was why they had gathered at the President's dead and useless assembly. That was why they had never dug to plant food. It was why they had traded their daughters into pretend marriages. And it was why they had gathered to kill me for what I had done.

Pulled Engine Fugue

Eric Day

My dad drank wine from large goblets every night. Said it was right because it was in the Bible. Moderation's the key - Jesus turned water into wine. The Bible, he said. Just read the Bible. I asked if I could have some too. Said it was wrong because it was in the Bible. The law of the land stated I was underage - render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. My dad rested all day every Saturday. Said it was right because it was in the Bible. Six days labor, the seventh for rest. The Bible, he said. Just read the Bible. My dad wouldn't let me go to the Friday night football games or the dances after. Said it was wrong because it was in the Bible. After the sun goes down, that's the Lord's time, our time to rest, until the sun goes down on Saturday. The Bible, he said. Just read the Bible. Can I do something Saturday

night, I asked. No, he said, you mow the lawn on Sunday. That's called labor, and I need you fresh for it. What about Sunday night? No, he said, that's a school night. What about in the summer? Talk to me then, he said.

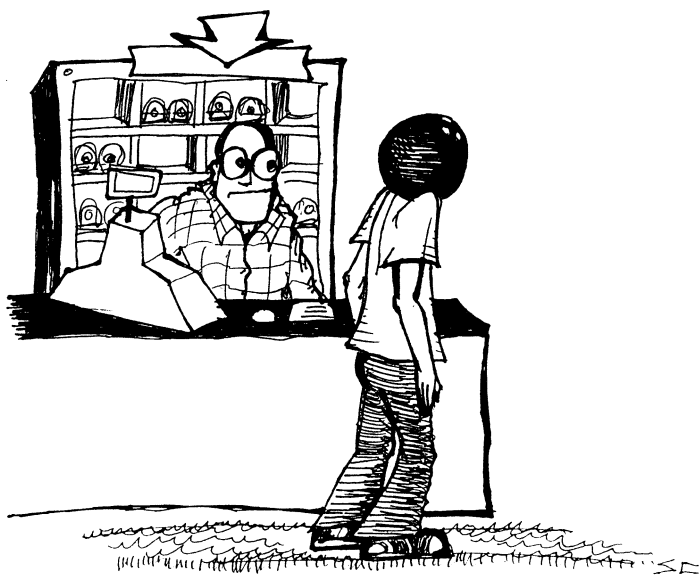
THE AFFLICTED SHALL
EAT AND BE SATISFIED,
HE SCREAMED, AND
WENT ON HIS WAY,
TAKING THE BOTTLE
FROM ME.

I leapt two stories down from my room to go run to the forest to

drink his wine. I thought it was right because it was in the Bible. God created nature and behold, it was very good. So I was hanging from a tree limb with one arm, drinking wine with the other, when I saw my dad pass in the woods carrying a rifle and a sack of pheasant. Said it was right because it was in the Bible. The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied, he screamed, and went on his way, taking the bottle from me. Your mother's on a jag, he said. Just read the Bible. Later, when I was digging a trench I thought I might live in, my dad came back without the bottle or the gun but with a skinny tree branch. He tried to get me over his knees and spank me. Said it was right because it was in the Bible. The father shall not spare the rod. The Bible, he said. Just read the Bible, but I was already running, looking for that bottle or maybe even that gun, but I found neither that night.

When I got home my dad wasn't mad, he was asleep on the pantry floor surrounded by dead birds. My mother was petting his hair. I asked her if she'd let me go to the football game and the dance after. My dad's eyes popped open, said he pulled the engine out of my car and just go ahead and try to start it. Said it was right

because it was in the Bible. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you. Who was my God? Who was this Lord? And of which land did he speak? I went out to the garage and there it was, my engine, sitting on a table covered in sheets of plastic, nuts, bolts and grease everywhere. My dad smiled from the doorway, half his face imprinted by linoleum. Said pulled engines were right because it was in the Bible. The son shall bring the father joy. The Bible, he said. Just read the Bible. That's not in the Bible, I said. Yes it is, he said. Show me, I said. No, he said. I will find other engines to get me out of here, I said. I've got you till you're 18, he said. I'll find different games to play besides football, I said. Batter up! he said. Past the driveway there's an endless supply of liquor, I said, and I'll drink until I'm sick. Down the hatch, he said, offering up his Bible like a parting glass.



BOWLING by *stepan chapman*

Monday Morning in Cincinnati

Scot Ehrhardt

On the corner
of Vine and Daniels
a man scrapes blood
like black-red paint chips
from the sidewalk.

Three blocks away,
a boy asks his mother
if the curtains in
the living room
will keep the
bullets out.

Maybe Thirteens

Scot Ehrhardt

Two sneakers
sway, daintily, from
a power line

seven meters above
Enrique

whose feet are wrapped
in grocery bags.

Imagine a cow's bellowing moo
sounding more like
a yapping dog whine.

On the island of Cuba
there was a record milk producing bovine
at the same time
as a dairy shortage.

Cuba's dictator for life
demanded that his scientists
explore the field of genetic engineering,
cloning the record breaking cow
and shrinking her greatly,
until she was a fraction of the size
and could fit inside
a bedroom closet.

The only problem with genetic engineering
is once you begin,
where do you end?

Because once you have miniaturized
the cow and the bull
can you imagine how little
the rodeo clowns have to be?
Tiny, tiny cowboy clowns.

Children of New War Culture

Rey-Philip Genaldo

Scene: Southern California

Start: 2003, February 14

N. Korea has ballistic missile capable of hitting U.S.

Okay, there are two best friends, Girl#1 and Girl#2, walking in South Coast Plaza, approaching Carrousel located in Carrousel Court, having just left the massage chairs and foam pillows of Brookstone, now heading towards Emporio Armani to envy each other's tummy and skin and hair. The clapping of their Coco Chanel knock-off heels is drowned out by clapping of what they think are hundreds of less worthy heels; the \$84.90 Eau De Toilette Chanel Spray for women that grips both their necks, a spray the two went halves on to afford, a spray that their noses have already numbed to, is lost in a sea of unique body odors and cheap OC Market Place derivative perfumes; the supposedly shock-inducing, supposedly runway worthy, "classy sexy" outfits they animate* are ignored by all Plaza-goers with the exception of boys who lie about their virginity; and the make-up they wear, like second layer of skin painted by other girl in a ritualistic "South Coast Plaza day" manner, impresses only themselves (contrary to exaggerated lies they feed each other: "Oh that cute boy was, like, *totally* jocking you").

These girls are jealous of all the moments of attention South Coast Plaza receives that they do not.

Carrousel, landmark in South Coast Plaza, spins counterclockwise as the two negotiate large inconvenience while commenting on how inconvenient it is to have to negotiate it. But they soon forget their gripes as they pass a group of boys and ask each other who, out of the group, she'd ever consider fucking – though neither are very experienced in fucking and both lie to the other about prowess and style and ex-lovers' penis lengths.

The boys pass without double-take or holler or cat-call, and this sparks a new debate. Girl#2 argues that Carson Daly, sexiest man alive they agree, prefers Britney Spears sexy over Christina Aguilera sexy. Girl#1 disagrees, saying that Tara Reid, ex-lover-friend of Carson Daly, is actually more Christina Aguilera sexy than Britney Spears sexy. The two stop in front of Emporio Armani and refuse to compromise their own arguments. Words like "Edward Norton-ish" and "Nicole Kidman pale" and "Brad Pitt acne" and "Pamela-esque" and "Natural plastic" and "Strawberry bitch" and "McDonald's makeup" are exchanged with a mounting intensity. This goes on in excess of two minutes and fifteen seconds before the two best friends are distracted by a shouting, "Fight! Fight! Fight!" and a bull-running of Plaza-going crowd to the opposite side of Carrousel.

*"Don't wear, *animate*," one reminds other as other flirts with full-length mirror.

There, the two girls find that two boys from the group of boys they had earlier passed are grappling with each other on waxed and shiny Carrousel Plaza floor. Out of shape security guards attempt to stop the fight, but non-fighting boys from group hold security guards back. Blood spills through the air like Silly String while meatpacking noises and crunching, couple with collective gasps and grunts from bystander crowd.

“That one is sexier than the other one,” Girl#1 says and points.

“Yeah.”

“He’s Carson Daly sexy.”

The two girls lose interest and leave.

Carson Daly sexy Boy is laid down on his back by the fist of Boy#2. He slides across the floor and the soft-spot back of his head is punctured by the corner of a sitting bench, and Carson Daly sexy Boy falls into a coma, from which he will never emerge.

The two boys were fighting over America, the non-fighting boys say, which, of course, is why they, non-fighting boys, had to let them throw down and not let any security guards stop the scuffle. “Who is more patriotic then?” Asks curious reporter.

“The winner. Duh.”

The winner, in this case, is Boy#2. The non-fighting boys have yet to find out that Carson Daly sexy Boy’s life is now held only by machine, that he has no control over bowel movements, that he will never again have sex, and that if this never happened perhaps he would have gone on to be the next MTV VJ for TRL, like the man whose sexiness the girls say he resembles. Tomorrow, the group minus one will visit coma-stricken sexy Boy in hospital, and police will arrest Boy#2.

But for now, Boy#2 is treated to an All-American dinner.

Rewind: 2001, September 13

New York Paralyzed

It is night time in Rite-Aid parking lot in Orange County, California, and Boy#2 pants heavily and sees his breath with almost childish awe. Crunching and meatpacking noises persist in the background along with the “Please stop – Please don’t hurt me” cries of a Filipino Boy unfortunate enough to look more Middle-Eastern than Pacific-Islander.

“Shut the fuck up. Fuckin’ terrorist piece of shit,” Boy#2 shouts, his back facing Filipino Boy as he stands off to side, his role as look-out man for police, while the others in the group swing baseball bats against Filipino Boy’s flesh. Boy#2 is not looking. “Gawd. Sounds fuckin’ butcher,” he gags on his laughter. Filipino Boy gags on his tears. The group and Boy#2 eventually run away as a suspicious car, maybe police car, approaches.

Rewind: 2001, September 11

America Under Attack

It is noon, and Father of Boy#2, a man known to Marriott as Employee#9349, argues with Boy#2's older brother, Ben, college student anti-war liberal, about what it means to be "Fucking American."

"If you don't want war, then you're on their side!" Employee#9349 shouts.

"They're bombing just to show us explosions on TV!" Ben says back.

"If you don't want war, then get the fuck out of America!"

Employee#9349 is beyond his luster years, a pale, wiry, exhausted old figure whose soul cowers behind a yellow-striped power tie. It is this yellow-striped power tie that gets him through Tuesdays, and this particular Tuesday is no different.

This abnormal day begins in a rather normal way, with his driving down Harbor, past Spanky's, Nighty's and Naughty's, motels for sexing, and nudie bars; with his entering corporate Marriott parking lot, his stepping into air-conditioned building, and with his sitting at desk on fourth floor, alone in his office because he is too early, early only because, in a most sincere sense, he despises home life, home children, home wife, and strives to, in any way possible, distract himself from the misery of just-now-waking despised family. Employee#9349 sits at desk, pushing back tear-jerking fact that he is middle-aged victim of '80s yuppie ladder jumpers, trying to persuade himself that he can still be promoted, despite his now downhill, gravity-propelled age and edgeless, blurry appearance. Yesterday, before leaving for bed, he promised boss that his team will, today, sell over twenty-four timeshare packages for Newport Coast Marriott Villas – but hijacked planes that fly into buildings see to it that Employee#9349 does not fulfill his promise.

In the wake of events, Employee#9349, with all other employees, is sent home for a day – not necessarily because of horrific terrorist act, but possibly because Marriott knows its telemarketers are not skilled enough to close sales with people on a day of horrific terrorist act and so corporate decides to cut losses ASAP. Once he returns home, with the help of yellow-striped tie, Employee#9349 faces off with oldest son Ben about what it is to be "Fucking American." Youngest son, Boy#2, stands in the background.

"Are you American?" Employee#9349 says to Ben.

"Yes!" Ben answers. "Of course I'm fucking American! I just don't –"

"You sure as hell don't sound fucking American! You sure as hell don't look like an American either!" Employee#9349 implies that he, man with number for name, is what an American looks like.

On television, droning in the background of the fight, a man says: "This is the age of innocence lost...forever will we remember nine-eleven, this day of infamy..."

Rewind: 1982, September 11

Gunman Kills 22 in McDonald's

It is night, and Marriott day has come to a close, and Employee#9349, in his early thirties and still exploding with life and hope for his brand new Marriott job as team supervisor who sells packages for Newport Coast Villas, checks into Shady-Eyes motel, \$29.99 for one night, with Barbie Woman Employee#8769, as his stay-at-home wife, pregnant with who will soon become Boy#2, takes care of Ben, a baby who just crapped his pants and is now crying. "Hey," Employee#9349 says to wife over phone, "I'm working overtime. I don't know when I'll be home."

Woman Employee#8769 still smells of French fries, having just come from local Burger King with Employee#9349, and she has gas but is too embarrassed to admit it. The two Marriott employees have sex to Pat Benetar's *Heart Breaker*:

"You're-the-right-kind-of-sin-ner."

Woman Employee#8769 sings while the bedsprings squeak. Being relaxed, she forgets about her gas, and as a result, she farts loudly and cringes in embarrassment. But Employee#9349 is too busy with his spiraling, uncontrollable fantasies of sexing Carrie Fisher to care; though he does notice, if not its sound then its egg smell.

One room over are two naked women laughing to the rhythm of Pat Benetar playing on the radio.

"Princess Diana or Pat Benetar?" The unattractive one says.

"Princess Di sexy is so much more sexy than Pat Benetar sexy."

"No, two totally different sexys. You can't say one sexy is better than the other."

"I'd rather fuck, say, Bill Cosby than Princess Di or Pat Benetar."

"Really? Gross! Why?"

"They're so, I don't know, commercial."

"Oh, yeah *right*, and Bill Cosby's, what, *punk*?"

"Sid Vicious was sexy."

"Yeah, well. Can't fuck a dead man."

The attractive one sighs. After a pause for thought: "Sid Vicious or Pat Benetar?"

Both are dying slowly, though they don't know this yet.

Fast-forward: 2003, February 14

U.S. Denies Everything

At this point in time, Carson Daly sexy Boy still grapples with other boy next to Carrousel in Carrousel Plaza in South Coast Plaza mall, and he, as of now, has not fallen into a comatose state just yet. He is fighting to prove how American he is, though ultimately, he will fail.

The two best friend girls lose interest before he takes that punch and goes dead in the mind. But before the two best friends go to Emporio Armani, they re-confirm: Yes, the other boy, the one fighting Boy#2, is most definitely Carson Daly sexy. And the girls fight over who gets to claim that she wants to fuck him. But Girl#1 turns around and notices Emporio Armani again and, as if struck with enlightenment tugs at Girl#2, whose eyes inevitably turn to Emporio Armani as well.

“Yeah,” Girl#2 says absently, “he is, like, so Carson Daly sexy. Oh, cute skorts. They’re going to make a come back, you know.”

“Twenty percent off boot-cut ultra-lows.”

Rewind: 2003, February 06

N. Korea Restarts Nuclear Plant

Days before Carson Daly sexy Boy goes dead in the mind, he begins and completes an 8-hour Tom Clancy’s *Splinter Cell* video game marathon and now his eyes burn. He puts down his controller just as he brings his cordless black phone to his ear. He calls up Auto-Dial#7 to talk about *Splinter Cell*.

Auto-Dial#7, however, has other, more important things to talk about, having just heard word from Insider Man who is supposedly the man to talk to when it comes to secret government information like the Draft.

“Insider Man says they’ve given the green light,” Auto-Dial#7 tells Carson Daly sexy Boy. “They’ve just given the word.”

Carson Daly sexy Boy has been waiting for Auto-Dial#7 to say this for some time now. So, when Auto-Dial#7 finally does, Carson Daly sexy Boy pauses and, for a solid second, talks only in choked squeaks.

“Hello? You there?”

Carson Daly sexy Boy gathers himself: “So they’ve given the green light, huh? It’s really happening? Inside Man said it’s really happening?”

“Yeah.”

“Finally. Did you know pussy-foot Tom is planning on Draft-dodging?”

“Fuck him, man. Pussy motherfucker can go suck all the Canadian dick he wants,” says Auto-Dial#7.

“If I get in, they’re gonna make me like a General, dude,” Carson Daly sexy Boy says. “And I’ll give all these fuckin’ cool orders and shit to all my troops to, like, blow up bases and shit. And even sometimes, I bet you, they’ll fuckin’ send me on covert operations like fuckin’ *Splinter Cell*. And if I die, they’ll like deny my existence, dude.”

“Oh shit man,” says Auto-Dial#7, “that’s hardcore right there.” After some thought, he says: “I wanna be a sniper like that dude in *Saving Private Ryan*.”

“Private Ryan?”

“No man. Not pussy-ass Matt Damon. I mean that sniper dude up in the bell tower who like kills tons of people and only a tank was able to kill him. *Fuck yeah*.”

“Yeah. And I’ll give you orders and you can like, fuckin’ shoot Osama Bin Laden in the face and then I’ll go over there and be like, ‘*Fuck yeah*.’”

“*Fuck yeah*.”

“*Fuck yeah, fer real*.”

Auto-Dial#7’s Older Cousin is activated a few days after Auto-Dial#7’s phone conversation. Older Cousin is shipped off overseas, spends two days on the field, processing, then steps on a landmine, loses both legs, and comes back home. News does not report this because it happens all too often.

An Old Filipino Man who had volunteered for military medical duty as assistant nurse took care of Auto-Dial#7’s Older Cousin as he recuperated from the landmine explosion and his loss of legs.

“You’re lucky you’re alive,” Old Filipino Man said. “God save you.”

Old Filipino Man was not always an assistant nurse working for the US military. He was once a Sanitation Engineer.

Rewind: 1982, September 11

CDC Recognizes AIDS as Epidemic

It is lunch time at the Marriott, and many of the numbered Employees filter into Cafe201 for healthy, over-priced salads and sandwiches. Old Filipino Man is there, holding a mop and cleaning up a spilt soup, loving his job but keeping his love to himself out of sheer embarrassment, an embarrassment stemmed from social insecurity, social insecurity fed by words he hears from these yellow-power-tie Marriott Employees like Employee#9349 (whose pregnant wife is at home taking care of baby Ben) and Woman Employee#8769 (who will take up Employee#9349’s solicitation for sex and, as a result of one night affair, will become pregnant).

Old Filipino Man listens in on conversations sometimes. He overhears Employee#9349 and Woman

Employee#8769 talk about childhood dreams. Old Filipino Man has no time to talk or think about dreams. He smiles, instead, and continues mopping soup from Cafe201's floor.

This morning, he erected an American Flag on his front lawn and he came close to tears, saluting it the way he imagined soldiers saluting flags.

Employee#9349 says, "As a child, I always wanted to be an astronaut." Woman Employee#8769 is impressed and she smiles and laughs and says yes when Employee#9349 asks if she'd like to meet up for some dinner after work and maybe get a room in a motel somewhere on Harbor Blvd.

"Shady-Eyes Motel is a good place," she says.

Employee#9349 laughs and becomes giddy, knowing he is going to get laid tonight. The two Marriott Employees will follow through with said plans, will meet up after work, will drive to Burger King after Employee#9349

calls wife and says he'll be late, will eat dinner and smell like french fries then check into Shady-Eyes Motel, will pay for an entire night because the front desk doesn't rent rooms out by the hour. And the two will have sex to Pat Benetar. Three times. During the third time, Woman Employee#8769 will fart because of Burger King while Employee#9349 fantasizes about a woman in a galaxy far, far away. Man with number for name will moan and come, his condom will break, and he will impregnate fellow Marriott Employee.

Barbie Woman Employee#8769 will refuse to have an abortion and she will never tell Employee#9349 about it. This child she gives birth to will be Girl#2, the girl who walks around with Girl#1 in South Coast Plaza, pretending to be rich and beautiful.

Fast-forward: 2001, September 11

Guerra

Noon, and Girl#2 is in a small Asian family-owned cell phone store. She receives a phone call from Filipino Boy, a boy she goes to school with, a boy who calls her almost every day, who hates her yet loves her in ways Petrarchan and futile. He calls because planes have flown into and destroyed the World Trade Center buildings and Pentagon. He calls because he

AT THAT MOMENT,
FILIPINO BOY WILL
CURSE GOD FOR
MAKING HIM LOOK
MORE MIDDLE-EAST-
ERN THAN FILIPINO.

is emotionally distressed, and he wanted to share this distress with the one he loves. She doesn't want to hear it, but he's cute so she acts like she's listening.

"I can't believe this is happening," Filipino Boy says. "You know my dad is silent all of a sudden. And he keeps saying, 'God save us.' It's fuckin' creepy."

Girl#2 says, "Yeah."

"Yeah? Is that all you have to fuckin' say? Did you know that there are terrorist cells everywhere? News said that we have to be aware. That we're all soldiers now."

"Yeah."

"Well, we do and it's fuckin' dangerous, okay? Where are you? Are you safe? Where are you? Anyone suspicious you see?"

"Yeah."

"Who? Where are you? Who?"

"Yeah?"

"Are you listening to me? Don't you see what's going on here? We're at war."

"Yeah." Girl#2 has found a cute cell phone cover with little green flowers. "Oh how cute," she says, then cringes, knowing Filipino Boy heard her over the phone.

"What are you doing over there? Where are you? Are you safe? They might hit California at any minute. Call the cops if you see someone suspicious."

This annoys Girl#2.

Their first night together four days ago when Filipino Boy confused her by saying, "Mmmm," to her sucking his dick, then said, "You fucking skank, go away," after he came in her mouth, confused her. But she was alright with this. She could forgive him for calling her a skank. He wasn't in the mood.

Their second night together, when he asked her to suck his dick again, but refused to go down on her when she asked and then left in a fit of rage shouting, "You think I'm fuckin' nasty like that? I'm not that kind of fuckin' guy, alright," confused her just as much as the first night, but that was forgivable too. He wasn't in the mood.

But Filipino Boy's incessant nagging, his frantic phone voice, his whining this day, September 11th, 2001, noon, as she shops for a cute cell phone cover, is just too much and she's sick of it all.

"Hello?" He says.

She sighs, and with a plucked eyebrow raised and an ugly facial expression, she says: "Look, I'm shopping for a cell phone cover, okay? You're bugging me. Go away."

Filipino Boy says, "You're what? Fucking shopping for

your cell phone? What the fuck's your problem? I'm fuckin' worrying about you and you're shopping for cell phone shit. You know, it really amazes me how some people just don't care."

"Care about what?"

"About this! Hello, anyone in there? This war!"

"Am I supposed to care?"

"Of course! Millions of people died!"

"I didn't know any of them. So what," Girl#2 says. **

Filipino Boy hangs up in disgust.

Two days later, Filipino Boy will go to Rite-Aid to purchase some Tylenol for his father, Old Filipino Man, because his father has become ill with a kind of grief he hasn't felt since his wife's death. Old Filipino Man will tell his son, Filipino Boy, "If God save us, I will quit my job and I will become someone who helps God save lives," and Filipino Boy will think that Old Filipino Man has gone off the deep end. At Rite-Aid, Filipino Boy will be approached by a group led by Boy#2. Boy#2 will say, "Hey, you fuckin' terrorist. You gonna fuckin' blow this Rite-Aid up or some shit? Get the *fuck* out of America!" At that moment, Filipino Boy will curse God for making him look more Middle-Eastern than Filipino. But Filipino Boy says nothing to Boy#2. Only stares.

And the Louisville Sluggers will be swung and Boy#2 will be look-out and Filipino Boy will begin to cry for help but only get baseball bats to his face. They leave him to die, but he will not. Filipino Boy will blame Old Filipino Man. "I wish you were white!" Filipino Boy will say, thinking that if he were white, no one would have beaten him up in Rite-Aid parking lot.

He's right.

Filipino Boy will never fully recover. His face will be forever warped and his walk will be forever crooked. Girl#2 will refuse to see him again because he's ugly now.

End: 2003, February 14

CNN center special report, Miles O'Brien:

"Let me show you something that is rather dramatic. One of our engineers here, who is a, uh, pilot, as well as I am, talk about these kind of things a lot, pulled up the

**Side note: Girl#2 actually does know one of the victims of 9-11, a girl named Roxanne Peterson, who went to Girl#2's high school for one year before moving to the East Coast with her family. Girl#2 and Roxanne Peterson were very good friends, and, in fact, did at one point describe each other as best friends. Now, Roxanne Peterson's body is nonexistent. They will bury an empty casket. Her father will be in denial of her death until his own, four years later.

weather radar for the [muffled out gap] Louisiana area and, um, *that* [*Miles points at screen*] is the wreckage of the shuttle Columbia coming through, uh, reacting to the radar which detects heat and motion [...]

“What you’re seeing, that *red scar* there is the final remnants [...]”

Girl#2 and Girl#1 never see Carson Daly sexy Boy fall and hit his head and lose his fight against Boy#2. The two best friends lose interest and decide to shop in Emporio Armani. Meatpacking and crunching sounds have given South Coast Plaza Carrousel Court a quiet, eerie silence, and Girl#1 can hear herself walking and she smiles because, as she later tells Girl#2, “People could hear how expensive I am.”

Afterwards, they stop at Radio Shack, where two HDTV-capable television sets are sitting behind the store’s glass display front. On one television there is footage of the on-going investigation for Space Shuttle Columbia. News Anchor, kind of beautiful in old way, tells of charred remains of bodies scattered across North America.

“Did a space ship blow up?” Girl#2 asks.

Girl#1 shrugs. “Do you think I should go back and buy that cute skort?”

On the second television screen is a commercial for *The Osbournes*. Girl#1’s face brightens and she points ecstatically.

“Oh! I so love *The Osbournes*!” Girl#1 shouts.

Girl#2 laughs and nods her head.

“Oh! I so love reality shows! They’re like so realistic, you know?”

“Yeah. So like, you know, realistic.”

“*Yeah*. You know?”

Their jaws hang loose and their eyes sparkle. Every now and again, they laugh at something silly that happens on the television screen. From a distance, it seems as though these two girls laugh at their own reflections in the glass.

All day long I've been thinking about Subway –
specifically of all the people who've apparently lost
so much weight by eating their subs
and of these new television commercials not so
much advertising a food
as a life, and wondering if such a life exists.

Watch them.

You see them running around, eating their subs,
throwing frisbees,
comparing their old pants with those of Master
Jared
and they're all so happy.

And more than anything else,
I want to know, I need to know
that such picnics actually take place.

They do, I'll bet.

On a nice May afternoon like today,
I think Jared calls up the whole gang on his
cellphone.

“Hey, guys, let's go have a picnic.” And then they
discuss everything. Who's buying the subs,
bringing the soda. Do they drink beer?

I suppose not.

And then they get together,
and just share in being together,
and in not being fat.

Listen. I had two Reese's peanut butter cups
for breakfast.

I was in a hurry, on the way to class,
and I just grabbed the first thing I could find,
and they make those little orange packages really
stick out, you know.

Walking by Old Main I started to not feel so good,
chocolate and peanut butter apparently not
being enough to take with your pills and your
vitamins

and I remember telling myself not to vomit,
having only a sense of how disgusting
vomit composed only of chocolate and
peanut butter would look.

This, I'm sure, is not something Jared thought
about this morning
as he woke up in his hammock and listened to the
bluebirds sing,
and he stood up and pulled an apple off the tree
above him.

Nibbling on the apple, he embarked on his brisk
morning jog
thinking today would be a great day to call
everyone.

I've noticed they don't show the fat Jared pictures
as much as they used to.
Now that we've seen the Jared we really love, his
former self doesn't pierce our consciousness.
I had lunch at Taco John's.
They're not like Subway. Their commercials just
show people eating food. Eating at Taco John's
doesn't make you worthy to go on a picnic; it
makes you a guy who eats at Taco John's.
And I looked around at the other guys who eat at
Taco John's and I felt very close to them. We
all knew what we were doing.
And I thought about Jared walking to the park
where all his Subway buddies were hanging
out and asking who'd brought the rope for
the three-legged race
and I wanted to try something like that with the
Taco crowd,
though I knew such a suggestion was
preposterous.
Everybody would trip and no one would win
which made me kind of sad
but not so much.

As the afternoon wore on,
I suppose Jared strolled home to study his Latin or
write a poem,
maybe even turn on the television and catch
himself perchance

But I digress. I don't know Jared. Those were all
things my Jared would do, the only Jared that
really matters.
The actual guy is really irrelevant.

But I was thinking about it so much I just had to
have dinner there.
His face on the door made me feel so welcome
and everyone there was so beautiful.
Funny to think that just across the street at Taco
John's we all have a layer or two of fat to
protect ourselves from each other
and how vulnerable all of these kids must
have felt.

But still that face drew them in,
the face of a man no better looking than they,
perhaps worse,
and some meaningless message about grams of fat
brought in such a stunning crowd
as though they, too, longed one day to be invited to
such a picnic –
a picnic that takes place only inside their
televisions –
that even after they were at their ideal ratios the
commercial still worked and still milked their
desire to eat fresh
or maybe just to eat
together.

I'm back now.

And here's that commercial again, creating in me
an emptiness, the desire to be Jared.

An emptiness not ingrained, but created by the
possibility of an alternative.

And, just for a moment, I wonder if I'm the
only one.

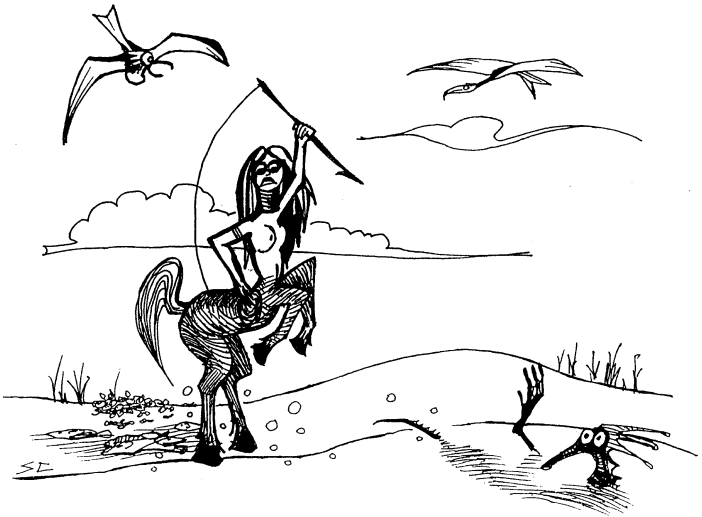
Or does Jared, too, watch this commercial,
the lights off in his apartment, opening an orange
package of peanut butter cups,
longing to be himself?

Government Property

Michael Kriesel

The worst sunburn I ever had was in Australia
I was 20 and reported on a weekend
to a tiny Navy base stuck in the Outback
I walked down this road a mile to
where somebody said the ocean was
stretched out on the beach and fell asleep
I didn't get the sunstroke I deserved but
I was red as snake blood for a week

on top of this my bosses had
me terrified I'd lose a stripe
telling me the same thing
happened to another sailor
a while back and he got busted
for damaging government property
since technically that's what
you are when you're in the Navy



CENTAUR by *stepan chapman*

Spiderman Vs. Jesus

Michael Kriesel

For 3 years I was married to a girl who was religious
both of us were in the Navy when we met
after we got married she got out
& spent 3 years looking for a job
while I made all the money
she ran the finances since she was better at it
giving 10 percent of all our money to the church
while letting me spend 10 percent
on my Spiderman collection

after a while I realized
the only thing we had
in common was biology
then of course it dawned
on me I didn't love her
after that I started to resent
a piece of every paycheck
going straight to Jesus

sitting in the kitchen one day
towards the end of our marriage
my wife made a remark about
my Spiderman collection
how I loved it more than her
of course she'd been clear
from the start that Jesus
came first in her life
but that was different

at least I have something to show for my money
I answered
every year my comic books go up in value
just like stocks
all you've got is some minister
saying you're going to heaven

my wife rolled her eyes heavenward
having heard this before
meanwhile I continued
what does Jesus need with money anyway?
either he's the son of god
in which case the universe is his
or he's dead
& needs two pennies
for his eyes

furthermore
in every picture
that I've ever seen of him
he's dressed in flowing robes
not one time have I seen
a single flowing pocket
on those flowing robes

even so I'd give him ten bucks
if he showed up at the door
taking contributions to end war
or maybe a bottle of Windex
for all that stained glass

that's the problem
my wife said
you don't believe in anything

this was where the argument
had always stopped before
in our 3 years of marriage

No
I said
I believe in The Amazing Spiderman
who has his own comic book
and who makes me money
instead of costing me money

And
I added quietly
in a fair fight with no miracles
Spiderman would kick Jesus' ass

my wife was staring at me as if I'd just
boned the neighbor's cat in front of her
but I was only warming up
my suitcases were packed & waiting
in the closet like the first few dominoes

granted Jesus was a carpenter
& those guys are usually in shape
& people walked everywhere
back then in biblical times
so he was one tough little Jew
still he wouldn't last two rounds
with the Amazing Spiderman
who has the speed & strength of an arachnid
thanks to being bitten by a radioactive spider
during a science experiment
not to mention his uncanny spider sense
which keeps anyone from sneaking up on him
plus his web which has the tensile strength of steel
besides being sticky as hell
so there's no way would it even be close
even assuming Christ was still alive
it's an open secret these days that the Catholic Church
has the body of Christ preserved in a glass coffin
like the one the Russians used for Lenin
and certain Popes have used this relic on occasion
as a coffee table to impress high ranking guests
while Spiderman who first appeared
in Amazing Fantasy #15 in August 1962
was a high school student at the time

so while he may be well into his middle age
he's very much alive as shown by his continuing
appearances in several periodicals each month

by this time my wife
had stopped breathing
her face red as a mask
suddenly gulping in most
of the air in the room
she started to sob while
I slept in a motel that night
with my comic collection
after the divorce
I sold my comic books
living off the money while
pursuing twin careers
in poetry and drinking
deprived of my financial aid
my ex-wife found employment
with the government at
twice what I ever made

amadeo modigliani:

Gerald Locklin

modigliani's early love,
feminist, radical socialist,
eventual british fascist,
dead by suicide in 1943,
in time to miss the repercussions.

it never surprises me
how interchangeable the "isms" are.
ideologies may come and go,
but the ideologue remains an ideologist.
it must be a deep-seated need...
for an identity?... platform?...
a club (in at least two senses)...
a substitute for empathy,
a substitute for independent thought,
a license to appease and silence,
common to the left and right alike
(and there are ideologues of the center,
to the extent that they strive not to budge from it.)

ideology is a substitute for art.
it is not art.
and ultimately it cannot make up for
a lack of talent and intelligence.

ACT 1. A plain young blonde with a great
body walks across a parking lot at midnight.
A man approaches.
Blonde: Are you John?
Man: Yeah.
Blonde: C'mon.
They walk back to her apartment
for expensive quick sex.

traffic is a curious thing
almost a living thing
or maybe more like a wave
the way it ebbs and flows
but it does take on a life of its own
sometimes
I suppose it's the people behind the wheels
and their particular demeanor on a particular day
but maybe it's the combination
of man and machine
a kind of mass cyborg event
or the individual cyborg entities
straining to become one huge cyborg
snaked across the state spewing smoke
and dripping oil
I suppose it is part of the reason
we do crazy things
hurtful things and weird
behaviors never seen in the country
or in places never touched by technology
at least not in so many varieties
or not as extreme
or only acted out by the one nutcase in the area
instead of the whole town seemingly filled
with nutcases and bizarre behavior
I suppose our half-machine personas
struggle with the shifts necessary
as the priorities of oil and blood
are determined
at eighty miles per hour on black asphalt
no time to soak it all in
evaluate what was seen and heard
just enough time to make a split-second decision
to get off at the next off ramp
or swerve and miss the bumper
left in the lane
from last night's accident

Jackass Sucking on a Stogie

Randolph Nesbitt

Scene: The early Fifties. Somewhere in a large industrial city in the U.S.A. A large black man stands at a bus stop. It is snowing lightly. He has a heavy coat and his brimmed hat is in his hands. The flakes softly land on his bald scalp and disappear turning into small droplets. He is smiling.

nobody remembered how he came to be
there
there on the street, frozen
life sucked out of him by pain or
depression or
some otherworldly demon
he missed the last bus no doubt
no change for the phone
town shut down
waited maybe for a passing car
it never came
slowly got cold so he never knew
what didn't hit him, just kind of slowly
pulled a cold blanket of death
up over him
shiny cream colored Cadillac pulls up slowly
tall lanky white man with slicked back hair
gets out and stands over the corpse
he's smoking a foul-smelling cigar
he's grinning like someone just told him a joke
just then the morning bus pulls up
the passengers are pressed up against the window
craning their necks to see death on the pavement
"Too bad," the cigar smoking jackass says,
"his bus just got here."

A Crowning Achievement

Michael L. Newell

This is no tragic time.
This is melodrama.
Take a prating knave,

A tumbling bumbling clown,
A bully with a smile,
Bestow on them a stage.

Hire writers with no scruples.
Rent billboards – fill with pictures.
Stuff socks in every mouth

Which might dare to mutter.
String wire into homes –
Scold all who dare say no.

Remind them of their duty.
Remind them of their fealty.
Suggest that NO is treason.

Require all men, all women
To praise all their leaders.
The one who leads the leaders

Shall get a brand new name.
Ave Imperator.
Ave HE WHO GUIDES.

Challenge

Michael L. Newell

rascal depths the life I lead
he winked and stripped a wallet
from a passing pedestrian

nonsense that life over there
he flicked his head toward
a distant brace of skyscrapers

inhaling and exhaling a stream
of three piece suits and
swaying mini-skirts

I might have been those you know
then laughed naw not me I need
the challenge of laws to slip

between around under and over
what is the point of order
without subversion

I slum among the gentry to do
what I was born to do but I live
in darkest alley and meanest club

this interview is over slip back where
you came from before I remove
all you value and hide from scrutiny

at last sight of him he was waving one hand
over his head while the other tipped
bourbon to his smirking lips

eyes in the walls directed me
out a gate into the world beyond
his rascal depths and I relaxed

in sunshine poured from a blue pitcher
and celebrated the order of daylight
dipped into a pocket my hand

discovered all notes all my documents
were gone gone gone vanished
in the chaos I had just left

midnight a phone call you can have them
all you need do is return and claim them
no safe conduct this time you must take

your chances you must meet me razor
to eye blade to throat you must be willing
to reinvent yourself and all you know...

To The Drug Store Girl

Daniel Roche

The cars didn't notice her much and she just sat along the curb not causing any trouble or anything. No one gave her a glance. Not me for that matter, at least not really, I only wanted to get in and out of the store. But she was only waiting for someone to tell her when the pharmacy was going to open up and nothing more than that. She held this green balloon tied to her wrist and played with an ant family on the ground. Her dark hair tied up in a couple of pig tails but not done very well.

I could see her getting real angry and slapping her mom's hand telling her

she could do it herself that morning. When I walked past her she jumped up and wiggled her little hips and placed something very carefully in her front overall pockets and followed me in. She waited on the other side of the aisle while I looked through the flu syrup, her balloon followed my footsteps. She heard me make my pick of the syrups and popped her head around the corner next to the chip bag stand. Big white eyes and white teeth and dark skin waited for me to say hi but before I could she handed me a note, a prescription.

Her step brother's real sick and he needs this medicine to help him feel better or at least that's what she told me and I believed her.

Eyes that big are incapable of telling lies.

The pharmacy was closed for another ten minutes so I waited and opened my flu syrup and take a little swig. The little girl started searching her pockets gently pulling out little crumbs, her brow all tightened up until she gave out a little squeal and opened her hand to find a dead ant. The syrup was starting to kick in.

I told the girl to stay put and left to pay for the medicine and told the clerk to keep an eye on the little girl next to the pharmacy. On my way out I saw her back on the curb.

I headed over and watched her carefully place her ant under some dirt

on the sidewalk. She didn't know I was there or she did and ignored me.

She quickly made the sign of the cross over asphalt grave and jumped up to follow someone else in.

The days when the winds come from all sides, it'd seem they're dead set on driving Midget crazy again. And just when she was beginning to get her marbles back into their bag. If she thought she could sneak the truck keys out of Dexter's pocket, she'd buzz off to the 7-11 to cop a pack of Marlboros – so what if it's been three years?

The winds have Dexter picking at the sun moles on his temples. They're bleeding. He's done his best to stop Midget's carping. Spent most of this morning removing a tin spoon from the disposal, then tinkering about til he's discovered the motor is beyond repair. Damn! Probably another sixty bucks. Where will it come from? Yesterday she had him crouched down scraping black Velveeta off the oven walls from the cheese potato peels she made for the grand kids and messed up big time. What the heck was she doing yapping on the phone and staring out the window at Arnie Jensen while all that smothering smoke was rolling into the TV room?

That woman!

These winds!

Jensen's out there right now – sanding down that awful tin shed with Brillo pads. It should have been scrapped when he bought the old Worcester place. His ass is less than five feet from the window of the TV room and you can be sure Midget is not watching Dr. Phil. Jensen's painted his name on his mailbox, said "Hello" a couple times. Doesn't appear to have a wife or kids. Parades around his backyard wearing tight jeans – sometimes without a shirt. Doesn't seem to give much mind to the winds.

Midget says, "I hope that boy gets the color looking good. Somethin that'll go nice with my TV room walls if I'm looking out. Course I don't reckon that's a issue to a kid like him. Whyn't you go over 'n introduce yerself, Dexter?" (What she means is, *she* wants to get close to him – Arnie Jensen. Smell him. When the winds come in from the northwest, she hangs around the backstep. Raises her nose to the air. Tries to pick up his scent. So far, she hasn't gotten much.)

"Color a them flowers in yer wallpaper is the same as first day colostrum. You mean you want him to paint it that? It'd make me sick looking out at that. A kickin calf might love it but some ole cow's colostrum'll make a guy puke."

"Yer bleedin again, Dexter," she says. "Don't pick at yerself. Don't go out in the sun. It's cancer." Dexter loses himself in his collection of *Field and Stream* magazines. Touches the ads – as if he could possess their promises. He'll go out in the sun if he wants to.

"C-A-N-C-E-R," she urges each letter up and out of her gut as if she were giving birth. Glares down to him like he's a first grader as he redirects his focus on reaming out the stem of his pipe. "If these winds don't up an quit, I'm gonna kill myself. Dexter! Cancer's gonna kill you.

An then we'll both be dead. **D-E-A-D.**"

She's been washing the window facing the shed a little too frequently lately. Doesn't just wash it. Gets down on her swollen blue knees and rubs it – always when the young man is out there. Sometimes you'd think she was trying to wipe his ass.

She trots off to the half-bath where the stacked washer-dryer combo is already running. Slams the door behind her. She spritzes the mirror above the toilet with Windex. Towels it spotless. Then with the tip of her finger, dips into her jar of *Good Earth* lotion. She glares stupidly into the mirror. She used to be so cute – a Judy Garland nose – Lucille Ball's heart-shaped lips. She holds her tired face rigid. Carefully draws a lotion line on the mirror around the eyes. Around the lips. The cheekbones, forehead, chin, ears. And now the hair. She steps away from the mirror. Leans against the rumbling, tumbling washer-dryer. She can't hear the winds. **Thank God she cannot hear the winds.**

The hair is not right. She adds swirls. Glamorous swirls all the way out to edge of the mirror. This part is easy. She's done it through so many winds. She adds long curled gorgeous eyelashes – like she used to draw on the back of her math books in high school. They look like upside-down seahorses. She applies a heavily caked layer of bright red lipstick in a perfect heartshape to her straight boring mouth – then kisses the mirror.

The doorbell rings.

It rings again.

Then she hears Dexter. And another man's voice.

Heavens to Betsy – she's a sight. Does not want to greet anyone with her lips painted up funny. Her hair such a mess. Who is calling at this time of day?

Suddenly the door to her private space opens. Dexter and... and Arnie Jensen. Arnie Jensen in his tight jeans with a bright open smile on his bright young suntanned face. "This is Arnie Jensen. Arnie...Midget. Mr. Jensen's washer's broke down and he's wonderin if he could do a load til he gets his up an running."

Jensen stares over Midget's shoulder at the mirror.

Midget stares at Jensen. *All* of Jensen – head to toe. Wants to get him out of the room so he'll stop staring at the mirror. Wants to get Dexter out of the room so *he* won't be looking at the mirror.

Wants to die.

"I've got cookies," she says, then titters like a slowbrain schoolgirl. "Do you ever eat cookies?" She boldly presses her hands against Jensen's firm butt. Maneuvers him around to exit. **Suddenly wants to live again.** (This is not Dexter's shriveled-up constipated old ass.) The lotion and lipstick on her fingers leave streaks on his tight pockets.

"Oh, you don't need to feed me," Jensen says. "I don't

mean to trouble you, Ma'am."

"Midget," she reminds him.

"Maybe I oughta give up on that old shed," Jensen says. "I never thought what it looked like from inside your window looking out. I was fixing to paint it about the color a the flowers in this wallpaper matter a fact. Isn't it funny how that is?"

"I'm handy with fixin things," volunteers Dexter. "Washers 'n what."

"Soon's my loads're done drying, I can do yours," says Midget. "You got much?"

"Mostly work jeans. White T-shirts. Takes two loads cause of the whites."

"Underpants, I spose."

Jensen ducks his face. Covers his eyes with a broad hand. Quietly shakes his head "no".

"Winds ever get to ya?" Midget says.

"These here are just breezes compared to where I was brought up, Ma'am."

"Makes me an Dexter crazy. Craaa-zy."

"Speak for yerself, Midget," Dexter says as he lights his pipe and passes the chocolate cookies to Jensen. Jensen politely refuses. Says he doesn't do sugar.

"You an artist?" says Jensen. "That's quite a piece of work on the mirror."

And this is when the winds kick up again. Midget's brain hurls itself into chaos with the force of a tsunami. She'd slit the Pope's throat for a smoke. She hasn't a clue why the cookies are brown. She does not recognize the two men in her presence, nor does she have a clue as to why they might have come together to intrude upon her. Maybe the young man has come to wash her windows. The old man stinks of pipe tobacco. She hates men who smoke. His fingers are the same horrible color of yellow as the flowers growing from the wall. If the color were in her crayon box, she would grind it beneath her foot, then tie it to a heavy rock and throw it into the deepest end of Lake Moran. She trembles at the sight of blood on the old man's temples and wishes he had thick hair to comb down over it. Or better yet, that his head would fall off and she could add it to the heavy rock along with the yellow crayon.

And as for the young stranger who has not brought his window squeegee, as he flees, she is baffled by the red scratches on the butt of his uncomfortably tight jeans.

Weigh a pint of the blood of the homo soldier
splattered on his foe,
a hero
dying for *his* cause
his country
what *he* believes is right

Weigh the blood of the hero foe.

Weigh the blood of the homo hero.

Weigh the blood of every proud soldier
downed by friendly fire
and the blood of every proud soldier
who fired upon him.

Tell all their kids
in pints, pounds, or buckets
the quantity of their loss.

Does a pint of the blood of the homo at war
weigh less in a jar?
than a pint of blood sapped from his foe?
or a pint of the stuff from your average Joe?

Compare to a pint of dirt or sand,
a pint of gold or a pint of lead.

Weigh a pint of the blood of the homo soldier.

Phone his mother
her son is dead.

What the Ocean Doesn't Get, the Desert

David Thornbrugh

Building our house so far from the ocean,
we thought we'd be safe, but now
garage doors open on a drop-off
of two hundred feet. Office towers
half a mile off hay stack the horizon,
hazy with circling birds.
Mornings the groggy drive down
the concrete tongue and go over the edge,
spilling coffee as they plummet.
Gradual was just a word, ivy coming
through fence boards one leaf at a time,
until it was too late, until the concrete
had been poured for the curved lip,
and daily the rusting wrecks accumulate
at the bottom of the cliff we'd come
to think of as home.

wordmakers

John Bennett » *A prolific and enduring writer with numerous credits. Formerly editor of the influential Vagabond Press. Most notable now for his hard-driving "shards."*

Joey Carbo » *Lives near New Orleans, Louisiana. Carbo plays music and builds swimming pools for a living.*

Stepan Chapman » *Lives in Cottonwood, Arizona and his illustrations have appeared all over the small press. He also writes short fiction, appearing in 'The Baffler,' 'Analog Science Fiction,' and 'The Comics Journal.'*

Eric Day » *Lives and writes in Tempe, Arizona. Day is working on his second novel, based on his experiences of never having been to India.*

Scot Ehrhardt » *Currently studying Teacher Education at the University of Dayton (Ohio). His fresh, concrete voice has appeared in several anthologies and publications.*

Gary Every » *Has graced these pages numerous times. His exceptional 'Cat Canyon Secrets,' 46pp of especially descriptive and fantastic stories from the southwest, is available for \$6 from the author at: pobox 5419, Oracle, Arizona 85623.*

Rey-Philip Genaldo » *A lifetime resident of southern California, who, thanks to his writing, has received a scholarship to study at Sheffield University in the UK.*

Elliot Harmon » *Lives in Vermillion, South Dakota, takes directing classes and works as a night clerk at Holiday Inn.*

Michael Kriesel » *Lives in the Wisconsin countryside pairing poetics with selling firewood to tourists. A few chaps out including 'Heart's Run' from Green Bean Press.*

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 Web sites.*

Randolph Nesbitt » *Stressed out mortgage broker from California, though ambitious and prolific in his writing. His sixth chapbook, 'Wet Grass,' is forthcoming.*

Michael L. Newell » *Newell has returned to the States after twelve years abroad to discover he is a total stranger to his country.*

Daniel Roche » *Lives and writes in Tempe, Arizona.*

Spiel » *A self-described 'reclusive duck.' A writer and illustrator with appearances in the best mags of the independent press. His latest book, 'Insufferable Zipper,' is available from Four-Sep Publications.*

David Thornbrugh » *A Ring of Fire poet who was born in Tokyo, raised near San Francisco, has lived in Vancouver, BC, and now hangs out in Seattle.*

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 submit their words to other's scrutiny. Please continue to pleasure me with your submissions.

— Christopher M.

killer reads

Four-Sep Publications Chapbooks

PRYING - Prying is a special edition of First Class featuring the words of Jack Micheline, Charles Bukowski (unpubbed), and Catfish McDaris. Images by Sinisa Dugonic (Belgrade), Jouni Vaarakangas (Finland), Carlos Serpas (Mexico), and Mike Tolento (USA). - \$5ppd

John Bennett

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE - a sweet collection of John Bennett's finely honed style of 'shard writing': stripped away convention beating like a pulpy red heart. The very sharpest cutting edge of his talent, and a most eloquent assault on post-modern sensibilities. \$9ppd

Alan Catlin

KILLER COCKTAILS - 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. \$5ppd

Alan Catlin

HAIR OF THE DOG THAT BIT ME - 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). - \$5ppd

Alan Catlin

THE LEPER'S KISS - the fourth installment in the Killer Cocktails chapbook series of poetics inspired by the river of patrons on the public side of the bar and invented imbibables, fresh from the mind of Alan Catlin, Schenectady, NY's very best bartender poet. - \$6ppd

Stepan Chapman

COMMON ECTOIDS OF ARIZONA - a romp through the field drawings and notations of the eminent Stepan Chapman, Doctor of Etheric Zoology. A superb collection drawn from the freakish menagerie dancing in Chapman's skull. A truly awesome work of art. - \$5ppd

Christopher Cunningham

SCREAMING IN SOME BEAUTY - poetics from a strong voice in the small press merging anger, urge and the quest for art into gritty clarity and words that will ring the psyche's call to contemplation. The book feels as good in the hand as it does in the head. - \$6ppd

Ed Galing

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, struggling in the crossroads of a city and growing up. - \$5ppd

Albert Huffstickler

IN THE CLEARING - 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

Errol Miller

THE DRIFTER TAKES ANOTHER LOOK - 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. - \$6ppd

Michael 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. - \$6ppd

Michael Newell

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

B.Z. Niditch

DICTIONARY OF THE 21st CENTURY - wordplay and wit in a format conducive to his quick, quirky jabs and observations. - \$5ppd

B.Z. Niditch

MASKS AND BEARDS - loaded with a continuous flow of killer short pieces describing absurd characters and their even more absurd actions ala the great Russian master of the absurd - Daniil Kharmis. Modern and Post- meet on these pages. - \$5ppd

B.Z. Niditch

MOVIE BRATS - this novella takes a serio-comic look at the tumultuous world of Hollywood and beyond during an era of political, sexual and religious uprisings. A big fat book of Niditch's intense, witty and fast-paced dialogue. - \$6ppd

B.Z. Niditch

3RILOGY - these three short fiction pieces explore art, humanity, political thought and the absurd underbelly of the 20th century. The fear of reprisal, unbelievable audacity and the mystery of murder - themes for a good read. - \$6ppd

Charles Ries

BAD MONK: NEITHER HERE NOR THERE - The Bad Monk, Charles Ries, marks shrewd, careful observations of the world around him, merging spirituality, a bit of beer, waffles and Milwaukee life. Bonus poem broadsheet! - **\$5ppd**

Charles Ries

MONJE MALO SPEAKS ENGLISH - is the second chap from the Bad Monk, Charles Ries. A refined, yet rough voice out of Milwaukee, Ries matures with meditations on Mexico, mamas, love and religion that have been pubbed throughout the indie press world. - **\$5ppd**

Robert Roden

THE SCOPOPHILIAC - 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." - **\$5ppd**

Robert Roden

THE BITTER SUITE - the is jammed with Roden's poetics pinning down new life, new death and new views, wrapped in the feel of dirty starched sheets, trapped behind the dual boarded doors of desperation and longing. - **\$6ppd**

Spiel

INSUFFERABLE ZIPPER - you get fifteen cunning and outrageous stories and intense character sketches. It's the reclusive Spiel's world of weirdos, women and wild worldviews - like bubblegum stuck to hot sneakers, if follows you. Read what's been called a 'fresh blast to the face and ears.' - **\$7ppd**

Wade Vonasek

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. - **\$5ppd**

Wade Vonasek

CLAY MOLDED INSANE - revolted by the social morass of the 21st century landscape, fantastic and creative words leap from poetics rife with mood and cutting splendor. Featuring artwork by Dee Rimbaud, Michael Labash, and Stepan Chapman. - **\$5ppd**

A.D. Winans

PEOPLE, YOU THINK YOU KNOW? - short fiction and poetics from one of the long-standing greats in the small press. This is Winans at his best with short fiction and gritty poetics. Get into Winans' head! Features fotos of San Fran folks, through the eyes of A.D. - **\$5ppd**

need a chap?

Looking for better production of your words?

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



Four-Sep Publications *also* produces chaps-for-hire under the 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 production matching the scale of your message. Professional layout and design 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, up to full-color covers and perfect-binding, and I assure you that you will reel in amazement. **Drop me a letter or e-mail (christopherm@four-sep.com) and I will work up a quote based on the info you give me.** Everything is included in the rates: shipping, printing, binding, and proofs-til-you're-happy.

Sample rates (remember to allow 4 pages for contents and title page:

Quantity	Pages	Paper	Price	Each
50	32	Royal Linen	\$195.25	\$3.91
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100	24	Royal Linen	246.00	2.46
100	32	24# White	237.10	2.37
200	36	24# White	391.60	1.96

The Royal 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 a cover printed on coated stock. These are samples and subject to change. Some special projects and various cover options may entail a greater commitment from both parties.

For additional information, testimonials, sample cover art and more, please check out www.four-sep.com and click on the "Lockout Press" link.

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.

There are a few important things to make sure that you do when you submit your work. For the computer users, please do **not** justify or force-justify your text. Name and address on the first page of each piece only. Send along a SASE. Disposable/recyclable manuscripts are cool. 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.

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-Christopher M.

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CHAPS AND BOOKS

LOOSE SHEETS and SMALL PRESS VERSE & POETICONJECTURES by **Alessio Zanelli**: In *Loose Sheets*, verses lavish the page with “thee” and “thus” – have you seen the word “coppice” in any of the poetics that you’ve read lately? What is remarkable about *Loose Sheets*, published in Britain, is that Zanelli is an Italian whose skills in English are self-taught. Diving into English from the springboard of a romance language, he is a reminder of just how gorgeous a language can be. Sometimes strict poetic form and classical structure is a refreshing divergence from the often brutal, hard-hitting maelstrom of contemporary indie verse. Yet, there’s often more punch in these well-constructed pieces than much of the tossed-out, tawdry bits of verbiage that are spattered across countless pages and Web sites today. Zanelli’s recent *Small Press Verse & Poeticonjectures* is a bit edgier and confronts the speck-like illusion that we are nothing. For Zanelli, life is utterly meaningful. Here is a writer who has embraced a foreign tongue, excelled in his ability to communicate through allegory and metaphor, and who gives you that pleasantly relaxed, yet invigorated feeling that once you’ve put his books down, you have not wasted a moment of your time. He lives in Cremona, a small town not far from Milan, in northern Italy. Both books are available through online booksellers such as Amazon and Powell’s.

THE CORNSTALK MAN by **Daniel Crocker**: I’ve always been interested in reading Crocker’s work, particularly his short fiction, although it’s often hit-or-miss. I’m either stunned by the originality and intensity of his work, or find it utterly forgettable. Could Crocker hold out for nearly 140 pages? Could he weave story elements throughout a vast canvass, rather than in short, intense bursts? Well, there are loads of short, intense bursts – particularly from the protagonist’s sweetly deranged mother – yet this novel, like all good pieces of fiction, is well thought-out, intricately plotted, and altogether a dark, delicious read. The plot left behind a succulantly sour taste in my mind, sort of like week-old spiral-cut ham, so tasty while devoured in a mad hunger, but the lingering specks and orts between the teeth ooze filth onto your tongue long after the indulgence. Food for thought... this is a good thing. The dangerous mental shadow of the Cornstalk Man hovers as subtext for so many other demons the Thompson family faces, as secret after secret unravels in a wild several months of Mamma’s treacherous rebellion against the town that despises her. She fearlessly betrays her children, while using them as pawns in her sabotage. Yet, in her mind she is just, and there is a loving mother beneath the vicious freak with, by far, the foulest mouth I’ve encountered in print in quite some time. This one is worth the \$12, plus the full-color cover is a work of art in and of itself. From Green Bean Press, pobox 237, New York, New York 10013 or at www.greenbeanpress.com.

‘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.