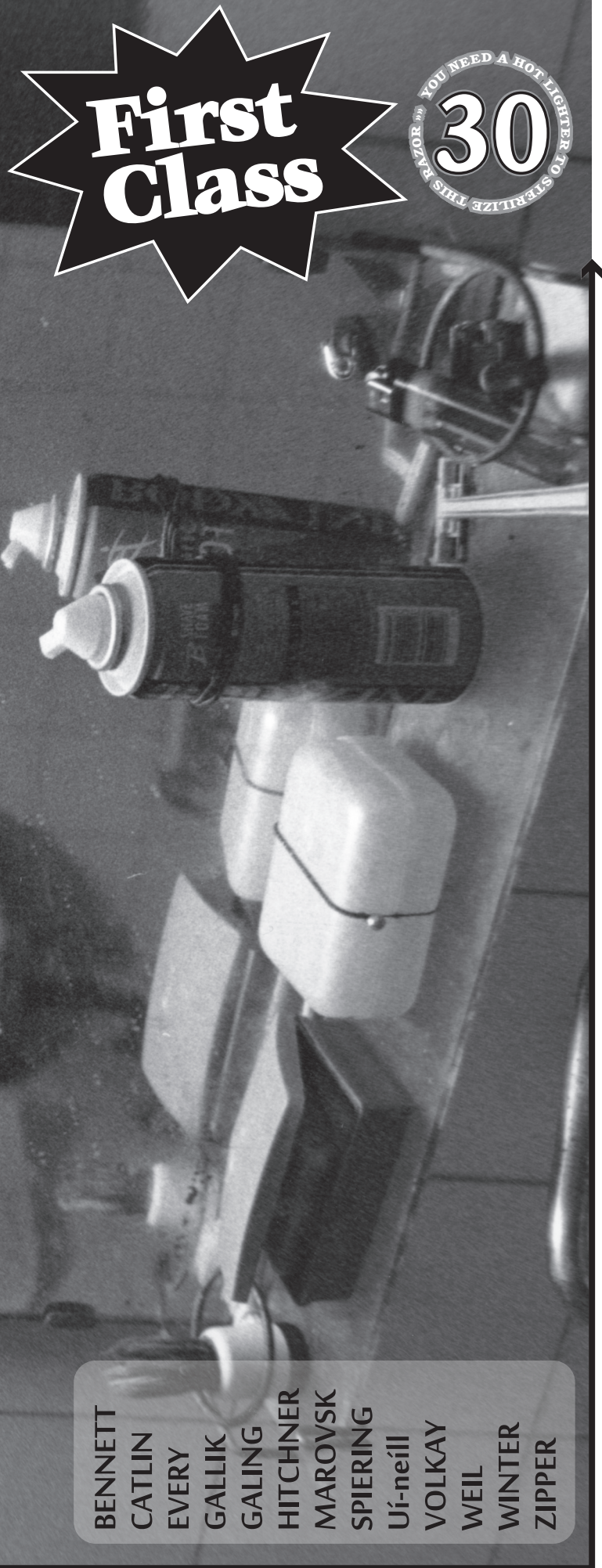


ISSUE THIRTY
FIRST CLASS I of II.2008
SIX BUCKS

*...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...*



BENNETT
CATLIN
EVERY
GALLIK
GALING
HITCHNER
MAROVSK
SPIERING
Úí-neill
VOLKAY
WEIL
WINTER
ZIPPER



ISSUE THIRTY
FEBRUARY, 2008

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.

WEBSITE : www.four-sep.com

CONTACT : christopherm@four-sep.com



ALL CONTENTS ©2008
FOUR-SEP PUBLICATIONS
Indexed by *The American Humanities Index*

FIRST CLASS IS PUBLISHED IN FEBRUARY AND AUGUST EACH YEAR BY FOUR-SEP PUBLICATIONS. FOR INFORMATION REGARDING SUBMISSIONS SEE "CATTLE CALL" NEAR THE REAR END OF THIS ISSUE. PLEASE ADDRESS ALL CORRESPONDENCE, QUERIES, CASH, AND SUBMISSIONS,

First Class » Four-Sep Publications
POBOX 86 » FRIENDSHIP, INDIANA 47021
christopherm@four-sep.com

[www.four-sep.com]

ALL RIGHTS REVERT BACK TO AUTHORS

SUBSCRIPTION INFO:

IT'S SIMPLE. SEND \$6 FOR THE VERY NEXT ISSUE MAILED DIRECTLY TO YOUR HOME, OR \$11 FOR THE NEXT TWO. POSTAGE IS INCLUDED.
CASH OR CHECKS PAYABLE TO : CHRISTOPHER M.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT.

First Class **contents**

- 1: **Mental Health**
by John Bennett
- 3: **After Hours**
by Alan Catlin
- 10: **Environmentalists**
by Gary Every
- 11: **Hohokam Time Travel**
by Gary Every
- 12: **United States Of America**
by Daniel Gallik
- 13: **Serious Change Is Coming**
by Daniel Gallik
- 14: **Graffiti Artist**
by Ed Galing
- 15: **Armageddon**
by Ed Galing
- 16: **When All The World Came Back**
by John T. Hitchner
- 23: **From Twenty-Five**
by Chriftor Marovsk
- 25: **home cookin': John Pone
country [sausage] gravy**
by David Spiering
- 26: **18cc's of blue-collar psychobabble**
by roibeárd Uíneíll
- 27: ***(o)verdose***
by roibeárd Uíneíll
- 28: **We Are Like This**
by Chris Volkay
- 30: **Dead Boy In The River, Philippines**
by John Christopher Weil
- 31: **Roofing**
by Don Winter
- 32: **Scott**
by Gerald Zipper

*Cover Art and Photograph, as well as any
internal photography by Christopher M*

First Class #30 is a month late for the first time in its 12-year history. I strive to assemble a thought-provoking publication that you can rely on to thrill your senses. Consider the First Class pobox a distillery of sorts. I'll be the picky vintner or brewmaster who knows just how he wants his elixir to tickle the tongue. Musty grapes and off-flavor hops hit the dirt and only the best combine to produce the final, well pickled product... or something like that. I reviewed a fine stack of submissions that stretched well over 36 inches in height. Plenty of fine material that did not fit First Class. Rather than push this issue through the press with material that may have tainted the flavor of First Class, I simply waited until the right final piece passed through the pobox. It did.

Just a note to those who are interested in the chap-for-hire services I render through Lockout Press. I am back in high-speed action after an 18-month respite. I have some new equipment and processes that should make your project perfect. So, drop me a line if you are interested in a sweet chap for the price of a hack-job at the copyshop.

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

Now, get reading!

- Christopher M.

- christopherm@four-sep.com

I served my country. Fought the good fight. Valor and “Can do, sir! Yes sir! No excuse, sir!” Lock and load and open fire. No child left behind, draft the lot of them.

So now I qualify for V.A. medical. Last time in, my doctor apologized for not catching the aneurysms a year earlier. I told him not to sweat it, he has enough on his mind, and anyhow, how is he supposed to detect an aneurysm from a man’s blood pressure and pulse rate in an annual check up? Hell, nine times out of ten they miss them with CAT scans.

I like my V.A. doctor. He’s a P.A., actually, a Physician’s Assistant. He was special forces, dropped out, went to med school. He’s a young wired black belt who reads books. When I went in for my initiation into the system five years ago he was passing by as the in-take nurse weighed me in, and he picked up on my plucky, flirtatious banter. “I’ll take him,” he said, and snatched my file out of the nurse’s hand. The place was crawling with WWII and Korean War vets who were overweight, disillusioned and sporting serious alcohol problems. I was a breath of fresh air. We spent most of that first session talking books.

Today I filled out a ten-page “how are we doing?” questionnaire from the V.A. I gave everything to do with cleanliness, courtesy and quality care an excellent, but then the questions began shifting, and suddenly it was all about “how was I doing.” They began digging around to see if I had a drug problem. If I was mentally disturbed. I sat back, lit a cigarette, and pondered whether to go on or toss the whole thing in the round file. Out of curiosity, I went on.

I haven’t had a drink in 22 years, and my drug problem amounts to cigarettes and coffee. Where it got interesting is when I got to the questions around depression and anxiety. It made me think of ten years earlier when I sat the entire day for days on end staring out the window over a cold cup of coffee. Sleep was impossible except in snatches, and I dropped forty pounds in two weeks. It finally got so bad I went to a counselor.

She was a foxy little thing, the counselor, and right off the bat she put me on Zoloft. She told me I was at the patriarchal stage of life and should assume that role, then I’d feel better. She referred to the books I’ve written as articles. I lasted four weekly meetings with her, and then one morning I found myself on a ridge at sunrise, dancing like a dervish and crying out, “They’re stealing my fire!”

After that I began exercising like a demon, forced myself to write and to play music, and got downright Spartan in all aspects of my life. Eventually, the blackness lifted.

If I’d answered truthfully every question on that questionnaire that probed for depression and anxiety,

I'd have been batting 1000 and they probably would have hauled me in for observation. So I toned down my answers to make me look like a run-of-the-mill vet mired in melancholy.

When I told that counselor I'd flushed the Zoloft down the toilet, she told me I was in danger of spontaneous suicide.

"Is there any other kind?" I said.

She said it wasn't a laughing matter.

I said, "Well maybe you'll find this funny—I'm flushing you down the toilet, too."

She sat up straight and her eyes went cold. In slow, measured tones, she said: "I can have you committed, you know."

"You don't want to open that can of worms," I said, and walked out.

Depression?

Anxiety?

By-the-book counselors?

Electro-shock?

Zoloft?

I'd rather be a gored matador lying face down in the hot sand than turn myself over to these soul crushers.

“Say what you will about drunks,” she said out loud to the dark room around her, “but no one will love you like they can.” - Rebecca Barry, later, at the Bar

“You can’t sleep here.”

“Who says so?”

“I do, Asswipe, watch your step.”

I wondered who he was, telling me I couldn’t sleep where I wanted to. A more pertinent question would have been, “Where am I?”

I raised my head and opened my eyes. The place I was in did not look familiar. Besides, it was dark and smoky and there were all these strange noises that were unaccountable at first sight. I had the strange sense that the voice that addressed me was not the only foreign body in the room.

And I would be right.

Gradually, the place I was in clarified. Behind the dusty shelves of bottles with their thin, metal speed pourers, and the ones with bulbous plastic tops obscenely discolored by liquids trapped inside; graveyards for fruit flies and pickled eggs. The pickled eggs of my eyes looking back in this dream of jaundice and of delirium tremens, of hallucinatory visions both auditory and visual. I felt as if I had moved beyond that place to some place even more threatening, some place where the scratched, broken back bar mirror’s surfaces had oxidized completely, had flaked off and what I could see in the surface where the glass should have been, was an interior of my exterior body; the unshaven, filthy face, my discolored eyes in a bleak solution of chemicals and acid washes unable to be still.

“Something bothering you, Partner?” a voice nearby was saying.

“Pardon me?” I was thinking.

“There are no pardons here. Thought we lost you for a moment.”

“Maybe you did. Where are we?”

“After Hours.”

“After hours? Where’s that?”

“In the bar, After Hours. That’s what it’s called. Tells you all that you need to know. Opens when all the other bars close. And stays open as long as necessary. As long as it takes.”

“As long as it takes to what?”

“As long as it takes to fulfill the needs of the people who come in.”

“Then it must never close.”

“That about sums it up, Partner.”

I tried to focus on the speaker’s face. Besides the unhealthy light, my focusing problems, and the man’s unlikely apparel, I could barely see his form, much less make out any specifics despite his being seated only a few feet away.

“What’s with the dark sweatshirt hood?” I was asking.

“Cold in here. There’s been no heat in here since the last Ice Age. Aren’t you cold?”

“Not that I’ve noticed.”

“You will be.”

I didn’t like the sound of that. I reached out to the bar and grabbed the green bottle next to the snifter placed in front of what must have been my space at the bar. The snifter was half-full, the beer had retained a light chill. It wasn’t a brand I favored but when in Rome, I thought, seeing that my neighbor had the same combination in front of him on the wood.

The beer tasted like piss and was notorious for the hangovers it helped induce. Whatever was in the snifter was an unknown at this point, but more than likely it was something lethal. The only sure way to dodge a hangover of epic proportions, one sure to follow a binge of unknown duration, was to keep on drinking. A wise man had said that. That was the myth, anyway. Like most drinking myths it was apocryphal. But that didn’t stop me from taking a healthy hit on the brown liquid inside the snifter.

After I swallowed, I released a protracted sigh, “Jesus that was good. Who would have thought a place like this could have such excellent cognac?”

“This place is full of surprises, that’s why I suggested coming here.”

“Wise idea my friend,” I said, toasting my neighbor, touching my glass to his thinking that what he said did not indicate that he had suggested coming here with me or that I had known him beyond this brief acquaintance.

“Yeah, this place has everything: atmosphere, conviviality and alcohol....”

“Conviviality. That’s quite a word. Where’d that come from?”

“If you’re good, I could spell it for you. Maybe even use it in a compound sentence.”

“Well, aren’t you the smart one; a man of hidden depths. What did you do before you came here?”

“Same as everyone else: got by, made a living.”

“Some people’s ideas of ‘getting by’ and ‘making a living’ are more complicated than others.”

“Ain’t that the truth. You know, one thing this place does lack is women.”

“Don’t you remember?”

“Remember what?”

“Remember the women.”

“Haven’t seen any. Not that I can recall anyway. Where are these so called women?”

“They went to freshen up.”

“Where? In Mesopotamia? They’ve been gone a long time if you ask me.”

“It just seems like forever.”

I took another healthy hit of my beer to wash away the lingering taste of the cognac. That and all this aimless talking could make a man thirsty. Thirsty beyond belief. I looked behind the bar for the man who was supposed to be tending.

“Where’s Smilin’ Jack?”

“Smilin’ Jack?”

“The bartender. I assume he’s the guy that called me an Asswipe. What’s his deal, anyway?”

“He’s just pissed off that he’s working. The guy that was supposed to relieve him never showed up. When push comes to shove, he’ll be around when you need him.”

“A real joystick, huh?”

“Something like that.”

I was relieved to hear that we wouldn’t go thirsty. There was nothing worse than being stuck in an arid desert, surrounded by potables you were unable to consume; a Samuel Taylor Coleridge water-water-everywhere-nightmare voyage that never ends.

I wondered what I was using for money to keep the Good Ship Doublepop afloat. I hadn’t been flush in years. You didn’t need to see an IN GOD WE TRUST ALL OTHERS PAY CASH sign in front of you to know that your credit was no good here.

I heard some scuffling noises behind in the dark of the room. It sounded like sumo wrestlers locked in some sort of mortal combat, grunting and thrashing about without thought or concern for what lay nearby.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“The floor show.”

“I hope there’s no extra charge. I might be running a little short.”

“Don’t worry about it, everyone here is running a little short. Some might even say that’s the whole point of places like this.”

By the sound of what he was saying, I didn’t really want

to go there. I turned away from where the noise was and took another sip from my drink.

“Ah, the pause that refreshes,” I said.

“You sound like a beer commercial.”

“Some of my best thoughts have come during beer commercials.”

We both laughed.

Then I heard it loud and distinct and clear, my favorite Rolling Stone song, “Tumbling Dice.” I began singing along in a low voice, becoming more and more animated as the song went on.

“You okay, Man?”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re acting like you’ve got some kind of herky-jerky disease. A loud herky-jerky disease.”

“I’m just singing along. Singing along to my favorite song.”

“Man, I don’t hear nothin’. Nothin’ but the taps leaking, the ice melting and the wheezing of the old geezer’s gasping for one last deep breath with cigarette smoke in it. In case you hadn’t noticed, even the TVs ain’t got no sound.”

I looked at where the twin black and white TVs sat on their perches behind the bar showing snow and flipping lines where the picture should be and the eyes of the old men watching just the same. Still, I could hear Mick singing plain as day, “Don’t you see the time flashin’ by Honey, got no money I’m all sixes and sevens and nines.....”

“That’s one white boy doesn’t have to worry none about his job.”

“Say again?”

“The way you sing, his job will be safe for as long as he wants it.”

I had to laugh at that. I was no Mick Jagger, nor was I meant to be.

“Where are those women anyway?”

“What women?”

“The ones you spoke of before.”

“Wasn’t me, Bro, must have been someone else.”

“I thought it was you.”

“Not me, Son, I just got here. But you, you’ve been here God knows how long. When I came in you were out, sitting up with your eyes wide open. At least, that’s how it looked to me.”

“What happened to the guy that was sitting here before you?”

“Beats me. People move on you know.”

“Yes, they do.”

“If you’re waitin’ on some women, I’ll help you wait.”

“Be my guest.”

“Mighty kindly of you, Son. What you drinking, Boss?”

“The same.”

“Sounds good to me. Let me buy us one. Hey, Jack, two more of the same and take it here.”

“I don’t know how to thank you.”

“That’s okay, no big deal. About them women....”

“They’ve been gone a real long time.”

“You know women. That’s their way, Man. Always fixin’ themselves up. Making themselves look good. Truth is most of the time a man doesn’t care what she looks like after awhile. All he care about is a warm body and a place to lie down.”

“Amen. I’ll drink to that.”

And we did, touching glasses as if we were two men who had known each other a thousand years. Before long, we’d be going over good times we never had, with all the people neither one of us knew, and all the good times we imagined we had together, with and without them. I looked forward to that and I’m sure he did too. We’d been through a lot together whether we knew it or not and there was a lot more to come.

“What do you do when you’re not here?” my companion asked.

“Nothing.”

“Me neither. It’s hard work. Harder than most people imagine.”

“Don’t I know it.”

“Where you headed after here?”

“Don’t know. Maybe nowhere. How about you?”

“Here’s as good a place as any.”

“You could say that.”

“I just did.”

We both laughed on cue as if this were a long standing joke between us. Our hands reached for our cognac simultaneously and we drank deeply before reaching for the long neck bottles of beer on the bar.

After a long silence, he asked, “You don’t suppose those women skipped out on us, do you?”

“It’s possible. Wouldn’t be the first time.”

“Well, if they don’t come back pretty soon, I’m a gonna drink her drink. Hate to see good booze go bad.”

“Amen.”

I looked to see what he meant by the women’s drink. Saw two cocktails melting down where they sat on cork coasters, their swizzle sticks sitting at an angle, bent

butts of half smoked lipstick stained cigarettes sitting in glass ashtrays nearby.

“They were lookers weren’t they?” I said.

“Sure were. Two finer women, I ain’t never seen.”

“Amen.”

We both drank and sat silently for awhile. Both of us feeling the great weight of absence pressing down on our shoulders.

“Sure wish they’d hurry, I’ve got a powerful urge.”

“Me too.”

We both drank at the same time as before but without the same energy and anticipation. Neither of us looked forward to what would happen if they didn’t come back. After hours just got longer and longer and longer with no one to help you fill them.

“Where do you think they’ve gotten themselves too?” I asked.

“Who?” my companion replied.

“The women.”

“What women?”

“The ones we’ve been waiting for.”

“I’m not waiting for anything, Slick. I’m just here to drink.”

I thought about that suggestion. It was as good as any I’d heard in some time. I wondered where my friend, the black guy had gone, when he had left, and who this guy was in his place. I wondered how long he had been sitting where he was and why I hadn’t noticed his arrival or the other’s departure. I thought about asking him some of these questions but I didn’t bother. I thought I already knew the answers.

There were only one kind of answers in a place like this and none of them were good.

I thought about leaving. Of picking up what remained of my money and moving on. I wasn’t sure where but there must be somewhere else, some place more hospitable, more agreeable, more convivial. Only one thought held me where I was, one inescapable, unavoidable truth; I was light a round and it was my turn to buy.

“I wish they’d do something about those TVs,” I said, as much to make conversation as anything else.

“Like what?”

“Like fix them, tune them in or something. There must be something to watch.”

“Why? No one is watching, no one cares what’s on. All the TV does is inhibit conversation and interaction. Besides, all the people here are here to drink. End of story.”

“Some people are watching.”

“You can call that watching if you want. It isn't really.”

“What it is it, then?”

“Staring. There's a difference you know.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah, I've been there but I got away.”

“How did you do that?”

“By drinking. The more you drink, the less energy there is for anything else.”

“Amen,” I said. But I drank alone.



GDANSK SHIPYARD 1995 by christopher m.

Special note: Gdansk, Poland, when known as Danzig, was the first Polish city invaded by Nazi Germany... such short memories.

Environmentalists

Gary Every

If I chopped up all the environmentalists
and turned them into fertilizer
that would definitely make the earth a greener place.
I am so tired of people writing speeches
about the dangers of global warming,
writing in their air conditioned offices
before jet setting around the planet
to give speeches,
to raise money,
so they can spend more time jetting and giving
speeches to raise more money.
Tired of people hiding behind
“Save the Trees” signs
when it is really about covertly expanding
property lines.
How about the Nuclear Power protestors
who never car pool to their rallies.

I hope the Apocalypse comes soon
because I have taught my daughter
to shoot a bow and arrow
so she can hunt your children for food
because they look sort of slow and plump to me.
At least that would finally do something
about overpopulation.

Hohokam Time Travel

Gary Every

A future ghost bursts across the road,
an antelope which rises up from the grass
and sprints alongside my truck and then passes.
This swift Sonoran pronghorn is in danger of extinction,
with only a few hundred left living
in the Cabeza Prieta Wilderness Refuge and Bombing Range
So the government did an environmental study
to determine whether the military exercises
were harming the rare endangered mammals
and what they discovered
in this driest of deserts
is that the bomb craters collect rainwater
and the antelopes use them to drink.
This nearly extinct species of antelope
is a future ghost,
bursting from the tall grass, racing alongside my truck,
emerging from a depression
which I know is prehistoric Hohokam charco.
An old O'odham shaman brujo named Jose Juan
used to live there.
They say that Jose Juan was the very last wizard
who was able to bring the blessed rain
armed only with a skull, some wine, and a song.
This dry dry desert is famous for its graves
and ancient archeology is scattered upon the ground.
There are ancient pottery shards, arrowheads,
and spear points
representing the O'odham, Salado, Hohokam and
mammoth hunters.
None of this stuff can be carbon dated accurately
because there is so much background radiation
that they get the dates from the far distant future.
Most people suspect that our own government
was using the bombing range
to test low yield nuclear bombs during the 50s and 60s
which our military denies,
claiming it is fallout from tests conducted by the evil Soviets.
I have another theory,
believing that the ancient Hohokam
possessed time travel technology
bringing these ancient future artifacts here
to warn us of the environmental apocalypse which awaits
us.
A rare Sonoran pronghorn races alongside me,
a subspecies which my grandchildren will never see,
a future ghost blessed with lightning speed,
as my truck rolls and bumps over the road
internal combustion gasoline engine chugging along
clouds of dust rising up behind.

United States Of America

Daniel Gallik

Thought he was cute when he said,
here, there are bears, and me,
with balding hair. Was his way
of saying they had arrived in

Yellowstone. The kids looked out
on the mts. Wife asked the kids,
whatdaya see? George chimed, they
don't see anything but wilderness.

Wife kept at her goal, hey sweeties,
ya hungry? The kids kept looking.
George kept interrupting, wow, I
wonder where Old Faithful is? Fun

was being had. America and their
dumb families parking their money
in expensive vans and doing good,
good things within the nature left.

At the same time. Men/women died
in another presidential war. Men/
women in Congress passed laws with
riders. Men/women starved from

gaining much weight eating starches.
Men/women in foreign nations looked
up to God. Wondering. Newspapers/
voices heard opinions that did not do

one thing to change the nation that
was founded on change. And too much
gov't. Too much aristocratic bucks.
Too much of too much of way too much.

Serious Change Is Coming

Daniel Gallik

The sacred voice is calling.
Two crows skirted the rocks
out on the beach as a man
sat in the sand looking
towards the sea. The man
was eating nothing. The man
was seeing nothing. He
was not asking any questions.
THE CROWS WERE IN LOVE. NOT
THE MAN. Not the earth. Nor

sea or sand or sympathies in
this moment. The voice sang.

The birds played. No one
knew animals could love. No
one cared. Anymore, love was
more with the wildlife than
with the intelligent beings.
God had done good. Yet, no
person could hear him. Not
anymore. Never again. For
his voice was calling upon
innocence. Not evil. And

the sweet sounds made animals
on earth rejoice. The talking

they had done in their huge
pasts was now turned to love.
The man noticed he was not
irritated anymore by the caws
of the crows. He noticed that
nature did not need him anymore.
He noticed he smiled more when
he viewed the ocean. That
things were more beautiful now
that his actions were innocence.

there he is
up on the scaffold
paint brush in hand
smearing the blank
wall

in the poor section
of the city

where murders and beatings
take place every day

where people fear to walk
after dark

where the dope pushers
live on every block

this graffiti artist
is busy with his work

i watch him
this black man
all by himself

his arm goes back
and forth over the
boarded up drug house wall
now empty

and watching as the
words
PEACE, BROTHER

begin to take
form,

in dark red words,
the same as blood
that is spilled on
the pavement

some day
when the bombs
stop killing
everyone
in
iraq

you may want
to go there for
a
vacation

this will be
many years from
now

after iran is wiped
out
after north korea
gives up the nukes
after russia and china
wipe each other out
in a tug of war
for supremacy

by then
the oil wells will
be wiped out

and gasoline in
america will be
ten bucks a gallon

and shows like
dancing with the stars
and entertainment tonight

will still be around
and global warming
will have melted all
the ice caps

and a meteor will be
coming to destroy
our civilization

unless it misses
our planet

make your
reservations early

When All The World Came Back

John T. Hitchner

Morning.

Wesley Mears stood on the top step outside of his apartment door and thought, *I will not yet go down.* The city moved by before him in complaints of motors and horns and shouts. *Not just this minute.* The gray overcast and the stench of exhaust clouded him. *It is always the same, not at all like a dream.*

Wesley Mears stepped down into the city.

He took rapid, purposeful steps to the subway kiosk one block away; a walk practiced over years and which now fought the ache across his lower back. Near the kiosk the sidewalk reeked of last night's beer and last night's urine; of leftover pizza and fries stuffed in the green receptacle marked 'Paper Only.' From the gutter Mears picked up an empty beer bottle and dropped it through the hole of the companion container marked 'Glass Only.' The bottle clinked against the others. He brushed his hands down across his topcoat.

At the kiosk newsstand Mears paid fifty cents for the morning paper.

"T'ank 'ou," said the clerk, reaching for another customer's money with his other hand. "T'ank 'ou."

Mears clipped down the steps to the cavern-like station. He slipped his token into the turnstile slot, waited, pushed through, and joined others awaiting the next train. The cavern smelled of popcorn, paper, and perspiration, oil and grease and, oddly, toothpaste. He smiled: *At least someone brushed and rinsed today.*

The train at first sounded a low murmur within the tunnel. Mears looked toward the sound down the dark. A single yellow-white light shimmered in the distance, grew bold, bright as the sound of the train clashed against concrete walls and pillars as the subway's cars, sleek silver, rushed into the station, brakes screeking like human wires tangled, struggling for air, the air gratefully offered when the wheels stopped, the brakes hissed, and the car doors opened. Mears boarded.

His eye caught an empty seat a foot from the door. He sat down and unfolded his newspaper. MISSING GIRL FOUND ALIVE IN HOTEL ROOM...DOZENS DEAD IN SUICIDE TRUCK BOMBING...SCIENTISTS TO MEET WITH PRESIDENT ABOUT GLOBAL WARMING.

The train lurched forward. Mears thought: *Things converge. A subway train into a station. A vehicle with a pedestrian, a bullet with flesh and bone, a missile with its target. Things planned, things random, but all somehow inevitable. And what remains? One's life, as patterned as a menu.*

The train entered another station. People departed the car, entered the car. Their eyes scouted for empty seats,

their hands held book bags, clutched hand grips, and their bodies steadied themselves as the train jerked forward again. They sat, they looked at the air in front of them, they read, and they listened to *whatever sounds buzzed out of their headphones, wires alive, pulsing no air, no blood, only electronic messages understood by some programmed cells of the human brain, a mass of flesh and nerves and blood that probably never heard a Liebestod, never looked upon a Renoir. Lives within and unto themselves.*

The train slowed. Mears stood. Elbows brushed his topcoat, nudged his ribs. "Excuse me," he said and dipped his shoulder toward the door. As the train ground to a stop, his right foot pressed the shoe of a boy wearing a purple and gold jacket with the name "Shaq" on the back.

THE CAVERN SMELLED
OF POPCORN, PAPER,
AND
PERSPIRATION, OIL AND
GREASE AND, ODDLY,
TOOTHPASTE.
HE SMILED: AT LEAST
SOMEONE BRUSHED AND
RINSED TODAY.

"Yo dude, my foot!"

Mears said, "I'm very sorry," but as he stepped off the train onto the station platform he felt the boy's eyes bore into him. Mears did not turn around as the train pulled away.

Wesley Mears stood outside the bus terminal and watched people enter the front doors. *They are going somewhere. Somewhere someone will greet them and embrace them as after a long absence. "Oh I missed you." Somewhere this will happen.*

He studied the terminal's facade. Sunlight heightened the sand-colored brick and dark Plexiglas, and shadow-like bodies moved behind the blackish-green windows. *The building needs nourishment. I do not want to go inside, but I will go inside, and I will sell tickets to the people going somewhere. This is what I do.*

In the transportation company office he punched in his time-card, dropped it into the slot labeled 'Mears', and hung his topcoat. In the men's room adjoining the office he checked his appearance in the mirror: white shirt; blue, red and white-striped company necktie knotted in the middle; company navy blue V-neck long-sleeved sweater with his first name 'Wesley' inscribed above the heart. He ran warm water in the sink, washed his hands, splashed some on his face, and then dried his face and hands with paper towels. The trash container beside the exit was full to the brim. As Mears disposed of the paper towels he had used, he pushed down the container's contents with both hands to allow for more space at the top. Finished, he washed and dried

his hands again. Feeling perspiration break out on his forehead and inside his undershirt, he grabbed another handful of paper towels, stuffed them in the right side pocket of his gray trousers, and pushed open the door with the shoe of his right foot.

Things converge, he thought again, and imagined toothed machines grinding into paper, the paper shredded, disposed into bins, the bins lifted by sword-like fangs and dumped into trucks, the trucks transporting the papered remains *to where? Great furnaces? Everything converges, everything's consumed. And what remains?*

The ticket station area was a long curved marble counter, an arc, Mears had always thought, of computers, money drawers, the metal housing below which the tickets were bound in rolls, and high swivel chairs with back rests. Each ticket station was enclosed by plastic panels the same color as the terminal building's brick façade.

"Good morning, Wesley."

"Morning, Grace," he said.

Grace LeMoyne sat at the ticket station to Mears' right. She spoke her greeting in the same two tones every work day: the first four syllables in an even monotone, the last syllable of his first name a note of finality below the others. He knew Grace LeMoyne lived in the eastern part of the city. He had once asked her if she had seen the American Masters exhibit at an art museum there, but she had said no, as if she had been unaware of such an exhibit. After that, he had never invited her anywhere.

"Good morning, can I help you?" she said to a customer. As she leaned forward, Mears saw her navy blue blazer bunch up across her back. He turned away and settled in at his station.

Tasks: 'This station open' sign at the front window. Log on. Ticket supply check. Money count check. Calendar check: Thursday, the 15th. *This weekend? Saturday breakfast at the bagel shop. Toasted cinnamon raisin with plain cream cheese, medium coffee, plus a small fruit salad. The morning paper. Afterwards? Groceries to buy, but I could postpone that until Sunday. Perhaps see a movie, or perhaps write a letter to his cousin out of state...* It had been a long time since he heard from Judith, only a brief note at Christmas. "We're fine. Hope all is well with you. Love, Judith and Evan." The card still lay face up on his desk at home, the scene a Copley print of twilight snowfall on the Boston Common. The scene often held him for minutes.

The woman was in front of him before he realized it.

"Oh, excuse me!" he laughed, and hoped his laughter did not embarrass or disturb the woman.

“Roundtrip to Philadelphia, please,” she said.

“Yes ma’am.” *Perhaps she is going to visit her son and his wife for the weekend. She has become a grandmother for the first time, and those packages in her arms are gifts for her son, daughter-in-law, and new granddaughter. Her son is a tech support person at a TV studio in Philadelphia. One day he hopes to be a producer.*

Mears punched up the tickets. “Forty-two fifty,” he said. He gave her the tickets and change for fifty dollars. “Thank you,” he said. “And congratulations.”

“Pardon?”

“On your happy event.”

“Oh, well, thank you very much. Do you know my family?”

Mears smiled at the woman. “I’m sure they don’t remember me but I hope things are going well for them.”

The woman gathered her belongings and walked away, looking once over her shoulder at Mears’s station before she headed for the stairs to the upper platforms.

Mears now saw a mustached man in a plain gray sweatshirt and denim jeans approach his window. The man’s mustache curled over his upper lip. He worried the mustache with the thumb and forefinger of his left hand. *One of the unfortunates. Perhaps twenty-five, perhaps forty, but part of us.*

“Can I help you?” Mears asked.

The man sniffed, rubbed his cheek on the shoulder of his sweatshirt, and said, “How far’ll a hundred bucks get me?”

“Round trip or one way?”

“One way.”

“Charleston, Savannah, Chicago...Depends. South? West?”

“Savannah sounds good. Warmer there’n here and Chicago, right?”

Mears took the man’s five twenty-dollar bills, slid the ticket to him, and gave him six dollars, thirty-seven cents change.

“Are you going to be all right?” Mears asked the man.

“Soon’s that bus’s on the Turnpike I will be.”

“Are you hungry? Do you want something to eat?”

“You got coupons’re something? Breakfast’d be okay.”

Wesley Mears gave the man a twenty from his wallet.

The man checked a laugh, shook his head, looked at Mears and said, “Never met a ticket guy like you, sir. You’re all right.” He clutched the bill in his right hand and shook his fist twice at Mears. “Thanks,” he said, and walked away.

Mears handled two more transactions: for a young woman who held the hand of a little girl no more than

three years old, and for an elderly woman who searched her small black purse for money. The elderly woman did not have enough money for a round-trip ticket to Williamsburg, Virginia, but Mears gave her the tickets plus fifty dollars additional change from his money drawer. The woman did not question anything. She put the ticket and change in her purse and snapped it shut.

“Will someone meet you at your destination?” Mears asked the woman.

THE MAN WAS DRESSED
IN SOILED TROUSERS
AND SHIRT, SHOES
WITHOUT SOCKS, THE
SHOELACES LIKE LOOSE
WORMS ACROSS GREASE
AND DIRT-SMEARED
ATHLETIC SHOES.

She gripped her purse with both hands, did not regard Mears, but appeared puzzled. “Where do I go?” she asked.

“I’ll walk you there,” he said.

He closed his station and walked quickly from the office around to where the woman stood. She clutched her purse in both hands. At first she

did not recognize Mears, but when he said, “I’m the man who sold you your tickets for Williamsburg and back,” her face and body relaxed. “Oh...Oh, yes,” she said.

Mears guided the woman up four flights of stairs, keeping his hand under her elbow and making sure that she caught her breath at the landings. “Go ahead,” he said, and let other people pass in front of the woman and him as they turned to walk to the gate where the Williamsburg bus was loading.

“Will someone meet you at the station?” Mears asked the woman again.

“My daughter,” she said.

“Do you want me to call her and let her know what time you’ll arrive?”

“That will be nice, but you don’t have to.”

“I would like to. What is her phone number?”

“I’m not sure but maybe you know. Do you remember?”

“No, I don’t,” Mears said. “I’m sorry.”

He walked the woman to where the driver stood to the left of the bus’s open door. He told the driver the woman’s destination and then asked, “Please look out for her?”

“Do the best I can, Mac,” the driver said.

“It’s very important,” Mears said.

“You got it.” The driver nodded and then looked beyond Mears at other passengers ready to board.

Mears turned to the other passengers and held out his left hand palm up. “Please wait?” he said, and then assisted the woman up the steps of the bus and to a window seat three rows back from the front. He stood in the aisle next to the woman’s seat until the other passengers walked around him and the driver boarded the bus.

“Be careful,” Mears said to the driver as he stepped back onto the platform.

“You bet, Chief,” the driver said.

Mears stayed on the platform until the bus rolled out of sight down the exit ramp.

When he returned to his ticket station, he carried his topcoat draped over his arm.

“I’m leaving,” he told Grace LeMoyne after she finished with a customer.

“You’re what?”

“Leaving. Don’t tell anyone you spoke to me or saw me. My window is closed, my chair is empty. I’m leaving.” He slipped on the topcoat, buttoned each of the five buttons, and turned up his collar.

“Are you sick, Wesley?”

“No.”

“Are you all right?”

Mears put his hands in deep in the pockets of his coat. “I’m fine. Thank you, though, for asking. It’s very kind of you.” He took two steps back.

“Wesley, are you sure?”

“You haven’t seen me. No one has seen me,” he said and walked quickly to the front of the terminal and pushed through the doors.

The city moved around him, but he pushed through the crowd that seemed never to end.

“What the hell?” “Who is that?” “Why don’t you look where you’re going?”

He ignored the words, ignored the faces. He walked, pushed past subway kiosks, past churches and hotels, restaurants and gift shops, banks and jewelry stores, offices with window posters advertising vacations in Rome and Athens—*fallen kingdoms!*—, offices with no one in the lobby, no one behind desks. He walked past uniformed policemen and uniformed carriage drivers and uniformed doormen, and he walked past hundreds, thousands of people not in uniform but in their clothing of the day—lawyers and assistants, models and clerks, receptionists and waiters, prostitutes and actors, doctors and teachers and nurses, so many other people, so many, until he stopped.

He put his face in his hands. He wanted to weep but he could not articulate the reason or reasons why; he knew only that he wanted to, and so he stood on the sidewalk as people moved around him, did not touch him as he covered his face and shook his head. "Oh God," he whispered. "Oh God."

"Hey, buddy."

He looked into a stranger's face and immediately stepped back.

The man was dressed in soiled trousers and shirt, shoes without socks, the shoelaces like loose worms across grease and dirt-smearred athletic shoes. His eyes were cloudy, the corners caked with what night had left in them. His breath reeked beer and mint when he again said, "Hey, buddy."

In as much a plea as in fear Mears said, "I'm not who you think I am. What do you want of me?"

"Sorry," the man said, stepped around Mears and moved on.

Mears counted the seconds--ten, fifteen, twenty--before he walked again, this time as if his steps fought against storm and reason. He knew not where he would go, what he would do, but he was certain that the street would look the same tomorrow, its people would look the same tomorrow, and the lines on his hands would, like machines, touch and converge and grind forever.

“Piss. I must piss.”

“Me too. I’m about to squeeze it out of both holes...”

“Why don’t you two piss off to the pisser and piss, before I get pissed off. I want to savor the last crumbs of this strudel.”

Shannon swept across the floor while Justine bounced and glid and shook her nipples against her shirt. The Rauch Room was teeming with fearful lunch nibblers on a typical Friday afternoon. Each round table held up the exposed elbows of divorcees and the crisp tie points of debtor businessmen. Wine was the intoxicant and seafood, Cajun-style, was the nutrient. Nobody smoked. Nobody smoked except for the three freaks at the table where the above dialogue took place.

While Shannon and Justine tickled the establishment’s septic water with their diluted spray, Rick pondered the strudel crumb on his lip, wondering if he should wipe it off with the napkin which was falling off of his knee, or with the back of his hand that was much nearer the source of his discomfort. His mouth watered as he tongued and sucked the morsel to a tight spot between his teeth and crunched the baked ort into bits. Tiny, minuscule, nearly microscopic bits.

Shannon stared directly at Justine’s curved mouth as they squeezed out through the bathroom door together. Her eyes and hands moved simultaneously in their next casual endeavor, four steps past the mission control center for the waitresses, seven steps from their table. With five steps to go, Shannon, in a low and husky voice, asked Justine if she would like to “streak *Midnite Luvlust Amber* across her lips.” Janet, at the table they had just passed, would miss her cosmetic on the way back to the office as she groped through her purse, nose in the bitch mirror.

Justine tossed the cylinder on the table and it tumbled, rolled, then tinked against Rick’s cocktail glass.

“Damn! You know I have three of those already. You gave them to me.”

Rick eyed the lip-coating tool, angry that the return of his friends had to be so dramatic. He sat, knuckles pressed wearily into his second chin, cheeks distorted, bladder distended.

“I’ll be back. Don’t worry, I’m buying this time. Finish your drinks. They weren’t cheap. These fuckers love to burn you. Hm.”

“Well, we’re having one more, so take your time.”

“Yeah, one more double vodka makes eight.”

“Don’t even think about forgetting mine...”

Rick’s chair actually scraped across the newly laid wood-slat floors, which caused a strange sonic

vibration to curl it's way up the legs of Shannon and Justine's seats, tickling the tiny hairs on their calves, itching their kneecaps, causing their eyes to flutter just a little bit at the prospect of his return. At that moment, the servant appeared with three new, fresh, alcohol-packed drinks. Before the cushion on Rick's seat had cooled, even slightly, vodka and bourbon made it past tonsils. The ice cubes in Rick's drink lolled and bobbed, cooling the warm gin from the top shelf.

Rick's head rode the neck of his slender, wiry skeleton, while his brain was 10,000 feet above the latitudinal and longitudinal positioning of his biological mass. His legs guided his oversized feet to the den of defecation. And, shit he did. He held his urine in so that he could piss in the ceramic basin on the wall while inhaling the crisp smoldering embers before he washed his hands. He had at least three minutes before the alarm.

"What took you so long?"

Two of the three drinks were empty.

"Yeah, did your pooper open up?"

"You know how seafood runs right through me."

"We were looking for your lighter."

"Yeah, I had to use the candle for my smoke."

Rick fingered his zippo as he lowered in his seat.

"Oh, shit. You didn't."

"Ooooooh. He did."

The third drink leapt through the air between the glass and Rick's smug open lips.

Gulp. Gulp. Gulp. Olive and all.

Rick eased back in his chair, as Shannon balanced her weight on her ass bone, and Justine clenched the seat edge firmly in her knee pits.

The warning buzz pierced the air a split second after Rick's glass slapped the table.

Heads twisted and panicked hands clutched valuables. The patrons of the Rauch fled in haphazard order. Rick smirked as he slid his seat back with the momentum of his departure. Shannon and Justine greedily tore the food and bar tab to shreds, and strutted out, arm and arm with the man who had bought them lunch.

Outside, sunglasses found their way to noses and ears, as burnt shit, piss, and crab legs mixed with the discharge of the passing cars.

Shannon was overjoyed by the idea of a free meal. Rick let the stench pollute his nostrils, and Justine, noticing a solo male, ran up to him and said:

"I'm so horny I could suck your finger and get off."

Within twenty minutes she was applying *Midnite Luvlust Amber* to her kissmoist lips in the elevator of the parking ramp she had just pealed with her screams.

home cookin': John Pone country [sausage] gravy

David Spiering

oklahoma's flat as a trailer roof—
so is Kansas and Nebraska—
“me, I'm a cook—my name's John Pone
my places are called truck stop eatery
and they're widespread all over
the heartland; I'm famous for my
sausage gravy that's made
from bacon grease—we save
the pan drippings, use cream
and milk and black and white
peppers, and [lots] and [lots] of greasy
pork sausage— ‘see the platform guts’”
he points out as he stands behind the lunch
counter, white t-shirted and wearing
a paper overseas cap—his gut's shaped
like a watermelon, his belt buckle
points at the ground—his patrons
look like they have fat podiums shaped
like truck tires riding on their hips—
“see—you got it baby, you betch-a-do, I'm
a gastro-artiste—I work with the human
stomach, greasy food's my medium—
look at that one” [he points with a fork]
“it's shaped like a gigantic beef steak
tomato or a heart glutted with fat-rich
blood—that one looks like two pillows
buttoned inside a shirt—and undertaker
comes in here and thanks me for the business
but he wishes I'd learn to put
the fat somewhere else than the hips
because they don't make coffins that are
diamond shaped—a doctor came
in here the other day and told me
he's sick of fixing my mistakes. I told him,
‘you get your cash and I get mine;’ then, he said,
‘their arteries are rough enough
to be used as sandpaper;’
as he turned to depart, I said
‘you want a quart of gravy and
a half dozen biscuits to take with you’—

18cc's of blue-collar psychobabble

roibeárd Uí-neill

"U.S. forces give the nod / It's a setback for your country."

-Midnight Oil

1

What would Billy Pilgrim
have concluded about the 1st Gulf War?
There's obviously no moral difference
between oil derricks & Dresden china.

Pentagon officials postured & preened.
944,000 rounds of depleted uranium were ex-
pended.
Traces of the 320 metric tons of syndrome
hopped transports back to the red, white & blue.

What if a failed state &
the median family income
switched countries?
The cost would remain the same...
...the unborn of sand & suburbia
subsidizing the hubris of empire.

Birth defects, lasses,
a leukemia chaser at the health clinic,

if it exists.

2

What would Walter Reed
have made of the 2nd Gulf War?
There's obviously no legal difference
between oil derricks & Ubaidan artifacts.
Approximately 650,000 Iraqis bit the cluster bomb
while Afghani afterthoughts pushed up poppy
fields.

Pentagon brass huffed & puffed,
swept G.I. Joe's PTSD,
his traumatic brain injuries,
under the hospital beds in Germany,
the first stop
where the truth was deep-sixed
in the pockets of profiteers
quicker than limbs
were rejoined to torsos
in the nursing homes of the brave.

Mold & cockroaches, boyos,
purple hearts, neglect & depression.

All at the discretion of an emperor
who should have saved our nation
by falling upon his own sword.

to Rick Waldo

“Let them call me rebel and welcome, I feel no concern from it; but I should suffer the misery of devils, were I to make a whore of my soul.”

-Thomas Paine

He marched on Washington,
where his medal
joined the fusillade
hurtling over the wall,
& cherry blossoms pattered him
with approval, another veteran
denouncing his involvement in Vietnam.

Big Fucking Deal –
he survived a history lesson,
only to turn right ‘round
& swallow the current disastrous lie.

He’s blocking an aisle in the restaurant,
feet together, back up & paunch thrust forward.
He’s slashing the air with *faux* salutes
as his whine mounts in volume,
exhorting me to re-examine
my pacifism & dissidence,
to toe the line behind
a failed, unelected oil-man
who’s blustered an entire commonwealth
into fighting an illegal, self-serving war.

But let the word “draft”
find its way into the mix,
& he vehemently claims
his sons will see the Northern Lights
before the lottery can chamber its first round.

What the hell,
he no more wanted to share the burden
than a black-hearted, money-laundered Senator.

It’s 2007:
4 years of conflict, & the stock market
still refuses to invest in truth or argument.
My tongue wags impotently, although my unarmed ass
would volunteer to stop a bullet for the promise of peace.

It’s 2007:
4 years of conflict, & i wonder if remorse
has washed away his first flush of nationalistic fever,
if he could find an American flag big enough to
drape
the casket splitting its seams with his conditional
patriotism.

We Are Like This

Chris Volkay

We are like this:

Because we try to force our balloony heads into the strictures of the pre-fabricated masks.

We are like this:

Because we believe in Godot-ey gods and alien-abductions with equal ardor and justification.

We are like this:

Because genius is the soaring of the painted bird among the hoards of puffing vultures, knee-deep in cigarette butts.

We are like this:

Because we mortgage our prime lives away to the sub-prime illusions of material “success.”

We are like this:

Because youth is wasted on the young; and life itself on us humans.

We are like this:

Because nobody and no thing has the guts left to be responsible for anything, anywhere at anytime.

We are like this:

Because we insist that people are interchangeable, mere spokes in Marx’s wheel.

We are like this:

Because we elevate and adore celebrity nothingness as our own precious lives go avalanching on down the hill.

We are like this:

Because we persist in believing that everything is part of some grand conspiracy, instead of random, meaningless, chaos that all life is.

We are like this:

Because, yes...as Mark Twain said, “Noah, didn’t miss the boat.”

We are like this:

Because we have separated ourselves from reality, opting for our own individual dustclouds of cloistering illusion.

We are like this:

Because we inherited this earthly paradise, but are only interested in living in ones that are up in the sky.

We are like this:
Because our problem is loneliness, yet
we deny it, right up to the time the gasoline is
trickling down the tresses of our hair.

We are like this:
Because science itself is hated, as it
might further crack the already cracked
superstitious crackage.

Yes... we are like this:
and no matter what any government, any
religion, any philosophy, any corporation,
no matter what any thinker, poet,
inventor says, thinks, or does,
100 years from now,
somebody or something, will be
writing this exact poem,
sentence for sentence,
word for word,
and wasting the paper
yet again.



BUDA AND PEST UNITE 1995 by *christopher m.*

Dead Boy In The River, Philippines

John Christopher Weil

Below a crumbling stone bridge, old men fish in the old way,
from rowboats on a river as gray as the heavy mist.
The mist settles on their shoulders like woolen capes,
lean arms protrude as if fleshless bones.
Conversation turns to ash in the mist.

The talk among the fishermen becomes echoed murmurs,
of a dead boy found shoeless and bare chested.
The fishermen are stoic, they pull on the lines like words
strung between them.
These men are cruel and emotionless.

This morning the bloated body of a brown boy
had indeed surfaced.
He washed up next to women laundering clothes
along the shore.
They finished their chore before reporting the body.
Upstream little girls continued to urinate in the water.
They stared at the boy, but did not run.

Two policemen dragged the boy further up the embankment.
They laid him on black mud. His death stare had fixed
on passing clouds,
as if counting sheep in an agonizing sleep.
The policemen smoked, lost patience waiting for the coroner,
then left the boy alone.

The coroner's crimson truck never came.
For days the glassy eyes of passing fishermen paid
the boy little heed.
But their tongues gave him words to hear,
words echoing under the bridge of heavy stone.
Died by drugs, they say, opium likely.
The driver of a Jeepney must have dumped him like a
sack of sand.

We have seen it all on the river, the fishermen tell an
American reporter.
These fishermen in their bones, all lean, skin tough like sandals,
talk as if nothing surprises them.
They are ghosts of the river mist who pass along the
weekly stories.

For several more afternoons a dozen rowboats float by the boy.
He is covered in flies so thick his face is black.
A nearby fishing line suddenly goes taut in the current.
So a fisherman pulls in the line only to unhook a pair of shoes.
Casually, he laces them together, and with barely a glance,
he tossed the shoes beside the barefoot boy.
To give him comfort in heaven, he said, his voice echoing
under the bridge.
Then he drifted on down the river without a glance back.

Mornings we ripped
shingles. When air temp topped
body temp we got buzzed.
We sat and smoked.

“I’d get monkeys
to do your jobs
if I could teach them not to shit
on the roof,” boss yelled.

We laughed like struck
matchsticks. Down in the street
sheets just hung there on the line
like movie screens.

Once I walked on a glacier
looked down into the beginning of time
crawled upon the great mass of compacted ice
not leaping across yawning fissures
not to fall away to frozen hell
Scott refused this knowledge
named after the famed Arctic Explorer
he believed he knew the truth
more civilized than the rest of the world
could see the curvature of the future
insisted animals were part of the human tribe
he worked his way to Alaska
hiked the rocky pathways north
sat at tribal fires
preached to eagles atop the great pines
made passage through the coastal waterway
trembled with excitement at sight of brown bear
massive creatures roaming the shore
leaped overboard into the tumbling surf
startling passengers ship's crew and lumbering bear
"I am your brother!"
ignoring the ship pulling away
leaving Scott to mix with his new brethren
converse with giants and rollicking babes
Rangers found his torn shirt and ripped shoes
scattered beside a pile of picked clean bones
warn all tourists who venture north
"never startle brown bear or people or nations."

wordmakers

John Bennett » *A prolific voice from the great northwest. Ran 'Vagabond Press' back in the day, and now runs non-stop 'shards' to his massive email list of readers.* [Nothing like a story from the inside, with perhaps a peek at what tomorrow's vets can expect. It stings a bit more straight from the swirling tempest of Bennett's brain.]

Alan Catlin » *Barmaster in Schenectady, New York. An oft-published and award-winning poet with several excellent chaps, a few of which are available from Four-Sep.* [I generally turn away from stories about drunks, or drunks drinking in bars, or drunks with other drunks drinking in bars... it's usually so damn tedious. Catlin, on the other hand uses this setting to communicate sensations, mental scenery, and mindsets like no other. A mellow tension permeates this piece and glues the reader to their barseat, hopeful and helpless.]

Gary Every » *His exceptional 'Cat Canyon Secrets,' 46pp of especially descriptive and fantastic stories from the southwest, is available for \$6 from the author (First Class will forward).* [The first one is just a fine jab at attitudes that tear at Every, the last stanza summing up a multitude of frustrations. Is it humor? The Hohokam piece is a great example of how Every can at once teach you something you did not know, while painting a point of view, through imagery and brief glimpses at the whole, that you discover upon blending with your own experience.]

Daniel Gallik » *Widely published, living in Chagrin Falls, Ohio.* [These two pieces mark more of my current appreciation for non-political political poetics. Poems that remind us of our humanity, yet are fraught with dread and helplessness. Sunny, eh?]

Ed Galing » *The famed Poet Laureate of Hatboro, Pennsylvania has appeared all over the independent press and numerous chaps, including 'Tales of South Philly' from Four-Sep Publications.* [Two more from this prolific and punchy poet. It never fails, but out of the dozen or so poems Ed sends me, there are always a couple utter gems. His simple (as in clear, not easy), pounding rhythm pokes holes in my head and leaves behind the feeling that I have read something new.]

John Hitchner » *Adjunct instructor of 'Coming of Age in War and Peace' at Keene State College, New Hampshire.* [This story simply shudders with mystery and emotion. I felt like I was roiling around in Mears' head while he made his way through the day, tense and disillusioned... utterly unsure of where I was going next, and what humanity held in store for itself.]

David Spiering » *Lives in Madison, Wisconsin, a fine town.* [We've all been there, and we like to think we know what that grease-slingin' chef would say... "his guts shaped like a watermelon, his belt buckle points at the ground" -- imagery? Perfect.]

roibeárd Uí-neill » *From Corydon, Indiana. His new chap "A Cosmic Clown's Handbasket Blues" is now available from the author.* [Here's a couple more from this malcontent I've come to admire. These two offer several takes on war, current and otherwise, from the results of the battlefield, to the responses in our dining halls and halls of power.]

Chris Volkay » *Lives in Van Nuys, California.* [Liked the buildup in this one. Not quite a rant, but a surging and swelling of certain emotive responses to our current cultural swoon. And, a stark reminder that it will repeat yet again...]

John Christopher Weil » *Plenty of published stories, lives in Lo Jolla, California.* [Priorities vary among cultures and conditions. This piece offers a glimpse into a world perhaps more honest than our own.]

Don Winter » *Widely known in the indie press and the co-founder of lit-mag 'Fight These Bastards.'* [One line got me on this short piece - "we laughed like struck match sticks." Thought I'd share it with you.]

Gerald Zipper » *Has appeared several times in FC, and lives in New York.* [Simply loved the idea of reckless abandon as presented here with the the misplaced passion and resultant demise...]

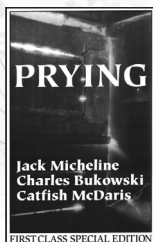
A booming thanks goes to all who have and continue to submit words on paper to First Class. I read every scrap that pries it's way into my pobox, and enjoy and appreciate the efforts of those who submit their words to other's scrutiny. Please continue to pleasure me with your submissions.

— 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 as well as images by Sinisa Dugonic (Belgrade), Jouni Vaarakangas (Finland), Carlos Serpas (Mexico), and Mike Tolento (USA). *Glossy cover/bamboo paper/28pp - \$5ppd*



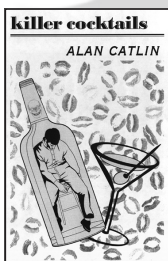
John Bennett

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.

Perfect bound/finest offset multi-color cover/72pp - \$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. *Offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/32pp - \$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). *High-end slick cover/linen paper/32pp - \$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. *Craft cover/linen paper/32pp - \$6ppd*

Alan Catlin

DEATH ANGELS - is 'Killer Cocktails' spun out of control. Blending poetics within prose, mixing characterization with chaos, and serving up a hell of an ass-kicking booze-drenched nite-cap; Catlin continues to call 'em as he sees 'em from his side of the bar. *Craft cover/24# paper/44pp - \$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. *Gloss cover/24# guts/44pp - \$5ppd*

Stepan Chapman

LIFE ON EARTH - travel along as Life On Earth is personified in the guise of creatures, characters and imagery (36 pieces of art!) from the inimitable pen of Chapman's distinctive ink drawings. It's a tragedy, that we are all living, as Life On Earth struggles to survive—a blasting stare into the mirror of our collective consciousness. *Gloss cover/24# guts/40pp - \$6ppd*

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. *Deluxe linen cover/linen guts/36pp - \$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. *Offset slick cover/24# paper/28pp - \$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. *Offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/32pp - \$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, one of the more prolific writers on the scene today. *Offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/50pp - \$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. You may reconsider your own situation and stance. *Matte cover/linen paper/46pp - \$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. *Matte cover/24# paper/50pp - \$6ppd*

B.Z. Niditch

DICTIONARY OF THE 21st CENTURY - features the wordplay and wit of Niditch in a format conducive to his quick, quirky jabs and observations. *Gloss cover/24# paper/32pp - \$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. *Gloss cover/24# paper/26pp - \$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. *Craft cover/24# paper/48pp - \$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. *Craft cover/24# legal-half/34pp - \$6ppd*

Charles Ries

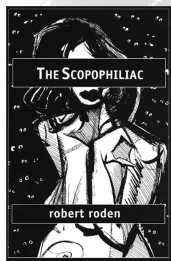
BAD MONK: NEITHER HERE NOR THERE - The Bad Monk, Charles Ries, marks shrewd, careful observations of the world around him, merging spirituality, a bit of beer, waffles and Milwaukee life. Bonus poem broadsheet! *2-color cover/24# paper/24pp - \$5ppd*

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. *2-color cover/24# paper/24pp - \$5ppd*

Robert Roden

THE SCOPOPHILIAC - the latest release from one of the Long Beach area's strongest voices. This collection stirs Lee Mallory to state that 'one could mount these poems, or like a greedy voyeur, just watch and listen'. Gerald Locklin observes that he 'blends the ineffable of the Symbolists and the cacophonies of Southern California rock into a music of his own'. *High-end slick cover/linen paper/24pp - \$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. *Craft cover/24# paper/28pp - \$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.' *Craft cover/24# legal-half/44pp - \$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. Vonasek was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize. *Slick cover/linen paper/32pp - \$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. *2-color offset cover/linen paper/26pp - \$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. *Offset slick cover/linen paper/28pp - \$5ppd*



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. Please do not "double space" after each period.

Name and address on the first page of each piece only.

Send along a SASE.

Disposable/recyclable manuscripts are cool and mandatory.

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.

www.four-sep.com

Speaking of technology » » » stay up to date at : www.four-sep.com

www.four-sep.com

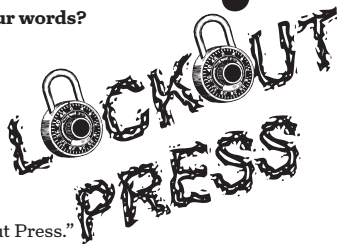
-Christopher M.

need a chap?

Looking for better production of your words?

For less than the copyshop?
Locked out of the publishing loop?

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, as well as inclusion on the Lockout Press page of the Four-Sep Publications Web site. 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: layout, design, **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	28	24# White	\$229.46	\$4.59
100	24	24# White	329.65	3.30
100	32	24# White	365.70	3.66
200	28	24# White	584.10	2.92

The 24# White paper is firmer and more opaque, than standard 20# paper. All chaps include a cover printed on quality stock, full color is available. 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. Due to a serious prick out there, half-down is now necessary after the first proof.**