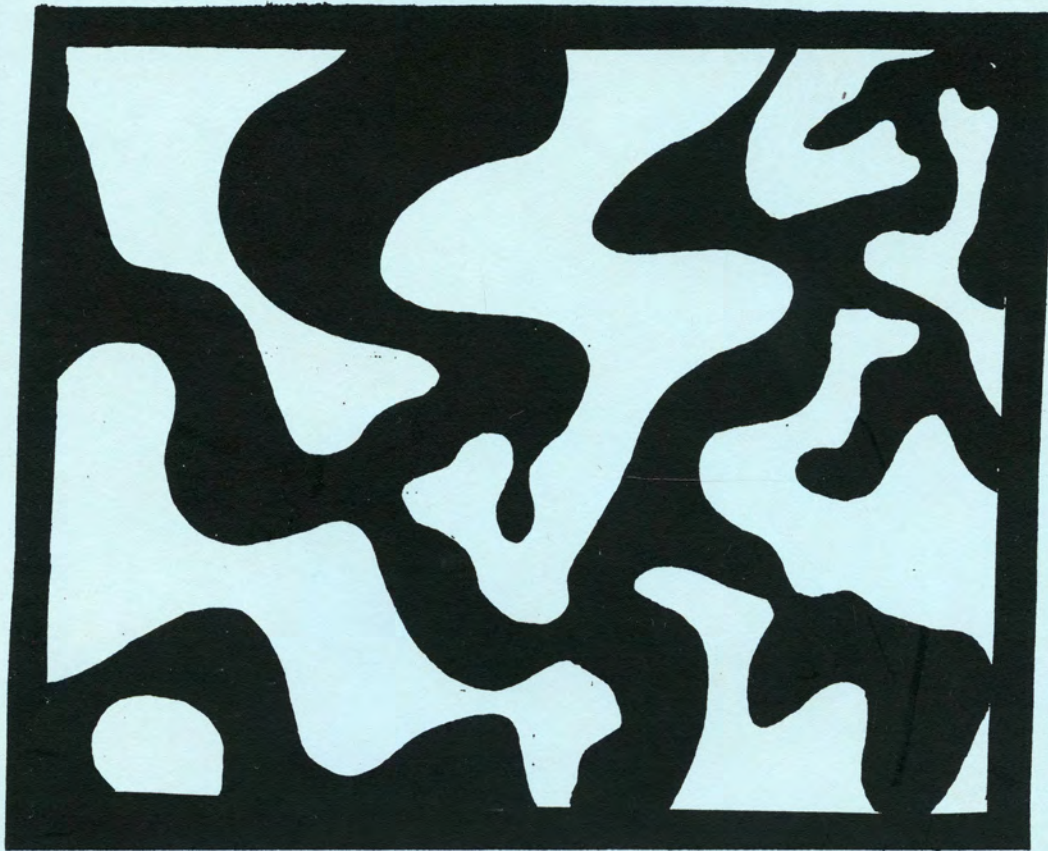


Marist College
Literary Arts Society
Presents
The Mosaic



Alphabet Soup

Issue 3&4

Spring Semester

Our Little World KAKO

HARLEM

As we stand at the crossroads of our lives,

As a young man

I never dreamed I would walk your soft-grey
streets.

I begin to get cold feet.

Young in mind,

We've been together so long now,

Ignorant in action,

with you I feel safe, secure and comfortable.

It was impossible to tell my people

I know in my heart the time has come to go,

as if I can't say any more

it's time for us to move on and grow.

THE WAY

We have to go out to our own

Alphabet Soup

and begin living the way

We're starting fresh and new,

leaving behind our soft little world

which we grow to love and know.

It's not that I'm afraid to move on,

I know the time has come, and cannot wait.

It's inside is nagging at my heart,

Hello again.

Welcome to the last issue of the Mosaic for the '93-'94 year. Due to time constraints we have combined our third and fourth editions into this giant sized issue which contains many works from the entire campus for you to enjoy. We are pleased with the interest in the Mosaic and we hope to continue publishing, but only with your help. So keep writing, keep submitting and have a good summer.

Again enjoy, thank you for your support!

Brian J. Elias

President: Literary Arts Society

Even though we are parting,

we really aren't leaving each other.

We may not be able to see one another,

but there are things stronger than sight.

Our love for each other will never die,

if we keep it alive in our hearts.

I just want you to know I'll always remember

you,

and I hope that somewhere in your heart

you'll remember me and the time we spent

in our own little world.

When my soapbox called me to speak,

They believed.

My people trusted my words.

My people saw hope in my words.

My people saw self-esteem and the pride of a

HERITAGE

When I said like an

ancient violet,

around

of any people

the criticism

to the people

If not me?

"We love you, Malcolm!"

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The entire English Dept.

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Our Little World KAKO

As we stand at the crossroads of our lives,
I begin to get cold feet.
We've been together so long now,
with you I feel safe, secure and comfortable.
I know in my heart the time has come to go,
it's time for us to move on and grow.
We have to go out on our own,
and begin living the rest of our lives.
We're starting fresh and anew,
leaving behind our safe little world,
which we grew to love and know.
It's not that I'm afraid to move on,
I know the time has come, and cannot wait.
Yet something inside is tugging at my heart,
telling me I don't really want to go.
There's something about this place,
that I'm going to miss more than life itself.
That's you, my friends, and all that we've come
to, through
the laughter we shared,
the tears we cried,
the memories we made,
but most of all the friendships we discovered.
Together we've been through so much,
through thick and thin,
we did it all, and we did it together.
Yet I know in my heart, the time has come,
we must continue on, our journey's just begun.
Even though we are parting,
we really aren't leaving each other.
We may not be able to see one another,
but there are things stronger than sight.
Our love for each other will never die,
if we keep it alive in our hearts.
I just want you to know I'll always remember
you,
and I hope that somewhere in your hearts,
you'll remember me and the time we shared,
in our own little world.

HARLEM

As a young man
I never dreamed I would walk your ash-grey
streets.
Young in mind,
Ignorant in action,
It was impossible to aid my people
in any way except
THE WRONG WAY.

Expanding my knowledge
Maturing my mind,
I grew to respect your streets,
Love your streets and revere your streets:
137th and Convent
188th and Lenox
166th and St. Nick.
The combinations were endless.
The plights of my people were similar.

125th and 7th Ave. always buzzed.
Preachers on soapboxes extended for blocks,
Spewing rhetoric to the crowds. And
Sometimes the crowd becomes a voice.
"I don't need to hear about fire and brimstone--
my hell is not being able to provide for my
kids."
"Jesus? Where was he when Mr. Charlie did
not pay me and dared me to complain?"

When my soapbox called me to speak,
They believed.
My people trusted my words.
My people saw hope in my words.
In my words, self-esteem and the pride of a
RICH HERITAGE
bloomed like an
African violet.

For the love of my people
I endured the threats, the criticism.
Who would love my people,
If not me?

"We love you, Malcolm!"

And I loved you back, more than you knew.
My Harlem, my people--the two are
interchangeable.

Harlem bore a Malcolm I was proud of,
My own people extinguished him.
Poetic Justice?
Is that the phrase I'm searching for?
I'm not sure.

In the bosom, close to the heart of Harlem,
My life was ended.
But my love did not die with me.

by Miriam A. Holt

BURNING

Deception is your favorite game,
You sure fooled me.
Or was I the fool for believing even one
word that so smoothly rolled off your tongue.
I used to love the sound of your voice,
I lived for what has turned venomous.
Now, I live struggling to forget.
You, the deceiver, blinded me of your many
faults.

Will I ever trust again?
I was falling in love, in a few brief moments
you stole that energy and into an endless
lightless pit.
The screams of my body and mind were
ignored.
WHAT DID I DO TO DESERVE THIS?

Now, your features have faded from my mind,
but I remember
the pain every time I here your name.
I cringe when touched,
the memory of those scalding hands and lips
that left burns and scars overwhelms me.
Will I ever love again?

by Sarah French

Indian Spring Chris Ilardi

We've longed for this day to arrive--haven't
we?
We had plans for lunch and to conquer the
world.

You talked of sitting in a park
and sharing jokes with the squirrels.

And I promised you the convertible-love
if you'd only take a ride with me.

But you never answered the door.
You stayed in bed for hours, dodging the
persistent sunlight.

How could you ignore a day like this?

insanity

at the end of the long, narrow hall there
is a door, huge and massive, letting no one pass.
i run to it, throw my entire being at it, beating it
mercilessly. why won't it let me enter? it
stands firm in its place, refusing to be moved. i
try again, and yet again...it's no use, the lock is
to strong. i know not what lies beyond it, but
somehow i know i must find out--i must get out
of this dead end hall...

desperately i search for the key,
frantically my eyes scan every inch of the walls
and floor that surround me. i begin to panic.
my heartbeat grows faster, and faster still. my
pulse quickens, pounding in my head like a
thousand drums beating rhythmically inside my
mind. the immaculate, white-washed walls
close in around me. the air is poison; i am
suffocating, gasping for breath; the heat rising in
my face is unbearable, burning my throat and my
eyes. HELP!! someone help me...please help
me!!

OUT!! OUT !! i must.....find....my...way...out....

a sharp, stabbing pain. everything begins to slow down. the room i'm locked in stops spinning...or was it really even turning in the first place?? i hear voices: soft, languid voices in the distance. they are muffled; i can't understand what they say... they are calling to me. the voices calm me, soothe me, soothe my frenzied heart, my gasping breath. i feel myself falling... falling... where am i going?

colours... there are colours all around me. brilliant rainbow hues of red, orange, yellow and green-- beautiful and bright. happy colors that lift my spirits and compose my shattered nerves. blues... purples... a soft light shines down from above me now, muting the vibrant skyscape into pastel shades of pink and lavender. oh, how i love the colour lavender... i'm floating now, suspended in mid-air on a soft cushion of clouds. how is this possible? i don't understand, and yet it is so beautiful that i do not try to fight it. the light grows brighter-- an amazing, blinding white. the door opens, and for an instant i can see what lies beyond...

a vast void of nothingness...
but then, far off in the distance...
if i could just make out what it is...
i strain my eyes; searching, probing the
darness...

then it is gone. the light fades. darkness enfolds me. but this time, it brings me no fear, no pain, only peace. i feel myself drift forward into the void, propelled by some unknown force. where is the image i saw in the distance? how do i reach it? the door closes behind me, and suddenly i realize that the vision was only a mirage, an illusion, tempting me to enter the void of my own free will. and i know now that once i enter, i may never leave. the lock slides into place with a thunderous clamour... as the echoes die, i am filled with the horrifying sensation of being alone... utterly and completely alone...

at the end of the long, narrow hall there is a door, huge and massive... waiting its next victim to find the key...

by Jackie Lynch

Awakening Alicia DiGennaro

Dawn caresses her silken fingers across the horizon.

The clock seems to speak slower and slower--

She was up all night again.

The melting icicles call me to get up and greet them,
while the frigid wood floor is yelling for me to stay off

My lover's arms give the final decision, never loosening from around me even for a moment.

The once green grass longs to breathe again, but
the dirty powder suffocated it, enjoying the power.

The brown slush-carpeted ground begs for a bath
from the clouds' tears, but they are not say today.

Spring Semester Janet C. Mills

The April sun has gone to their heads.

Concentration shrivels in the rays,

Melting Inhibitions.

They laugh more now, shed clothes,

Stumble into class like drunken sailors

Inebriated by spring.

Blue jeans, black leotards are thrown aside,

Replaced by gaudy Hawaiian flowers,

Seductive shorts, and torn everything.

No criteria clutters up the imagination of dress.

The pink faces of the girl-women

Bloom like tender tulips in a field of men,

Yesterday's boys.

Newly minted minds glint at the edge of the
 forge.
 Sheltered in shade, I watch the first flush of life
 Reflected back
 From distant sunburnt sons.

LONELY, OH SO LONELY

Lonely, oh so lonely.
 I sit crouched in the corner begging the vultures
 to pick my bones dry,
 but they just sit on their perches torturing me
 with their lies.
 Why can't you accept me?
 Why are you leaving my emotions to the
 vultures?
 Why do you drug me with your presence just to
 make me crave you?
 You tease me with my own addiction.
 Burning pain envelopes my existence.
 I just crouch further into the corner.
 My world is just a mask that I put on
 when I must go by the vultures.
 They chuckle when they realize how stupid I
 am.
 The corners open up exposing me to reality.
 I beg to be taken away.
 The vultures painful laughter surrounds me.
 They fill my ears to the breaking point,
 but still they won't save me.
 I would cry, but my eyes produce nothing
 but dust which blows away.
 You are the vulture waiting for the last break of
 my heart.
 Then you will swoop down and try to devour
 my heart only to realize
 my heart has already been eaten and
 destroyed by all the vultures before you
 and all the future vultures yet to come.
 The loneliness that I feel when I am
 with you is ultimate grief

By Julie Spann

by Mr: Wolfgang Mozart
 1765.



The Last Exodus Chantal Pecourt

I

Commander Kamara Peterson walked briskly
 down the almost deserted corridor. Her boot
 heels made a foreboding sound as they clicked
 on the tiles. Anyone who was unlucky enough
 to get in her way got out of it quickly. She
 turned the corner and entered the Computech
 Center.

"Dave!" she shouted, green eyes blazing. A
 thunk and a muffled curse were all the answer
 she got. A handsome brown-haired technician
 in a pristine white lab coat crawled out from
 under a computer console.

"Yes," he replied and then
 added, "Commander?"

Dave smiled as he rubbed his bruised head,
 "You shouldn't
 startle people like that."

Kamara scowled and waved a sheaf of
 papers under his
 nose. "This was waiting for me this morning,
 and I want to know what the HELL you people
 are doing!" she finished with a shout.

Dave held up his hands and backed away
 from her
 onslaught. "Hey, it wasn't us..I swear," he took
 a deep

breath," I know how much the project meant to you. We all had stakes in it.."

Kamara interrupted, "I spent two whole years on the Dubian project. TWO WHOLE YEARS! And now this, where did the data go? Why was it destroyed? Who ordered it?"

The Dubian project was Kamara Peterson's brain child. It was designed to help free the struggling human race from Overlord domination. After a series of deadly nuclear and germicidal wars, from which the only human survivors were those people lucky enough to be living on the Mars Base, the Earth was a barren waste land. Only the advanced computers had survived. They began to recreate themselves until they had gained total control of what was left of the human race. They felt that the humans were unable to live unwatched. The humans could not be trusted not to destroy themselves again.

The population was kept to a minimum, the populace controlled by drugs. Now after two hundred years of slavery to the machines, this handful of renegades who had escaped Overlord control were planning a secret exodus. The sole hope of that exodus succeeding was the Dubian project, and now it was destroyed.

"I have specialists working on the T-60 now. The preliminary reports indicate that we can recover some of the data. To get any more, we would need the technology on the Settlement."

"Why was it erased?" Kamara demanded. "The project was backed up by numerous safeguards."

"You won't like that report. The Overlords know what we are trying to do. Have for some time it seems.

They somehow implanted a virus in our systems. It is only a matter of time until it spreads through the rest of the ship and we have a total systems failure," Dave said dismally.

"Can't it be neutralized?" she asked. Dave shook

his head. "Does it pose a threat to the Settlement?"

"It's only a matter of time until the whole colony shuts down and we all die." Kamara met his words with stunned silence.

II

"Red Alert, all hands to alert stations," the calm computer voice repeated again and again.

The ship lurched sideways, throwing everyone to the floor. Kamara picked herself up and was nearly thrown down again as the ship was buffeted from side to side. She unsteadily made her way into the corridor and then to an elevation lift.

"Command Center!" she ordered as the doors swooshed closed. The lift doors opened out onto total chaos. The Command Center was filled with smoke and noise.

She stopped a white-faced young ensign, "What happened?"

"Wwwell... Mmmamm" he began to stutter a reply.

Lieutenant Burns interrupted, "An Overlord ship just jumped out of hyperspace and opened fire. We have taken hits in sections C, J and M with most of the damage centered around Engineering and Computech center. The inertia dampers have been reduced to fifty percent." Her report was stated in a calm voice but the glimmer of fear in her eyes betrayed her inner feelings.

Commander Peterson forced a reassuring smile. Then barked, "Return fire!", to the weapons officer.

"Can't. Weapon controls are not responding!"

"Get the shields up! Evasive action!" she ordered as she made her way to the command chair. The arms lowered over her lap as she sat down, giving her access to the ship's systems as

well as keeping her in her seat as the ship shuddered violently.

"Direct hit! Engineering!" The lights flickered and died. The sudden stillness was a sharp contrast to the noise a moment before. The emergency lights came to life slowly, bathing everything in a red glow.

O'Donnell nearly shouted, fighting rising panic, "Shields are not responding! Neither are the engine controls! All of the controls are frozen!"

Commander Peterson hit the intercom, "Engineering, I need the engines back on line!" The reply was fuzzy and faint.

"The Virus....been activated fully....infecting systems. Auxiliary... ..functional....can't....." The rest of the reply was lost in static.

"Engage auxiliary controls. Go to manual override if the controls don't respond. We'll make the jump to hyperspace manually if need be. Now get us out of here !"

The image of the Overlord ship veered off of the screen as the ship banked right.

"Auxiliary controls responding. We have lightspeed-one."

"Good." Kamara responded, allowing herself to breath a brief sigh of relief, "Begin hyperspace countdown... NOW!"

"Ma'am! The Overlord ship is in pursuit!"

Commander Peterson thought quickly. Whatever happened, the Overlords must not find the Settlement, "Go to heading 2310 on grid 500-1, increase power !"

"Hyperspace ..Now!" The screen dissolved into a rainbow of colors as the minuscule particles of space whisked by at incredible speeds, colored by the rip in the space/time fabric. The ship began to shudder violently. The strain causing the communication's console to erupt into sparks.

"Get that fire out !" Kamara shouted and gritted

her teeth as the shuddering grew worse. Hyperspace travel was risky enough when your ship was undamaged but a badly damaged ship in hyperspace... they would probably leave a trail of pieces from here to the Settlement, she thought.

Suddenly, the screen filled with white light.

"Jump to real space completed. We lost the Overlord ship in hyperspace," came the relieved report.

"Damage reports from all sectors coming in now."

"ETA to the Settlement?" Kamara demanded.

"In our present condition, approximately two days." came the reply.

"Maintain the maximum speed she can give. I'll be in Engineering and Computech center assessing the damage."

III

Kamara rose and swiftly made her way to Engineering. The corridors were hazy with smoke from numerous electrical fires. As she entered Engineering, she stifled a groan. The place was in shambles; computer parts scattered across the room; medics were removing the wounded and the engine column flickered dimly.

The engineer in charge saw her and limped over. "We took a direct hit. The way things stand now, we can maintain light speed 1.5 for a little while," he paused, reading her unasked question. "She is very badly damaged. I don't know if she'll fly again soon. I will be able to make a better assessment once we reach the Settlement."

"Start any repairs that you can, and see to your leg." She turned and walked to Computech Center. This room was relatively in one piece. Dave was running around, shouting orders. His pristine lab coat rumbled and torn. There was a nasty gash on the side of his head.

"We can salvage most of the data." he shot over his shoulder as he bent over a computer pad. Kamara sighed in relief.

"We will be getting to the Settlement in approximately two days. Have all computer data compiled and ready for transport to the Settlement. I think that the Overlords may know where the Settlement is, we'll have to convince them to begin the exodus early." Her last statement was met with disbelief. Dave started to protest but was cut short by the look in her eyes.

"Everything will be ready on this end."

"Good." She turned and walked briskly back to the Command center.

It took the damaged ship two and a half days to reach the Settlement. Commander Peterson was skimming through one of many damage reports as the Settlement came into view. She snapped off the computer and gave the orders for docking. She rose and stretched. It felt like she had not left that chair for two days, and upon thinking about it she probably hadn't.

In less than twenty minutes the crew began to disembark. Commander Peterson and Lt. Dave Britefield walked down the softly lighted halls of the human settlement. It was early morning and only those who had business to do were walking around.

They passed through the observation deck and paused to regard the view. The muted colors of dawn softened the harsh rocky landscape. The red cliffs off in the distance looked like rolling hills, not a death trap for hover craft. As the sun rose quickly, the rays glistened and sparkled as they hit the red crystals that were so prized for their power.

"It's beautiful" Kamara exclaimed.

"It is the one redeeming quality that this place has. I thought you had been here before." Dave said.

"No, I've never been to the Settlement before, too busy smuggling supplies off of Earth and dodging Overlord ships. Speaking of ships, we

will need to get new crystals for the engine core."

Dave frowned and mused out loud, "Crystal mining is down to less than 5%. The supply will be exhausted in less than a year."

"What about all of the crystals on the surface?"

Kamara asked as they began walking again.

"As the crystals are exposed to the ultra-violet rays of the planet's sun, they lose their energy capability. Only those crystals that are underground are usable. The others are good for no more than ornamentation." He ran his fingers over the crystal inlay on one of the walls.

They entered the Director's office at the end of the hall. The Director, a short, plump, middle-aged balding man, sat behind his desk, reading a report. He stood as they entered.

"Welcome Commander, it's a pleasure to finally meet the woman behind the legends." he said warmly, reaching to shake her hand.

Kamara smiled, "It is a beautiful place you have here Director. Director," she began as they took their seats, "My ship was attacked by an Overlord cruiser less than 1000 parsecs from the Settlement," she paused. The Director had turned three different shades of grey. Dave gave her a concerned look. "Is your planetary shield in working order?" she finished.

The Director stammered something and pushed an intercom button. "Get me a technician right away!" He looked up. "We have been having problems with our shield. It is the only thing that keeps our existence a secret from the Overlords, you know."

Kamara nodded. The planetary shield was the greatest technological accomplishment since the last great war. She was brought out of her thoughts when the Director continued.

"Our crystal production is down and we have had

to reduce power to all systems."

"That is no longer your only worry." Kamara outlined the details of the virus and then the attack to the ship.

"Director, we have to begin the exodus early," she continued quickly before he could protest. "Have you made any progress on the secondary project?" Before he could answer a systems expert entered the office.

"Is the planetary shield holding?" both the Director and Dave asked in unison.

"Yes, for now," the man replied. "We will have

to shut it down sooner than we thought. In ten months, the crystal supply will be exhausted."

"Frank, will you show the Commander and the Lieutenant to our communications lab?" then to Kamara, "Our communications specialist will update you on the progress of our secondary project. If you will excuse me, I must bring this news to the Counsel." He hurried out.

IV

They left the Director's office and made their way to the other end of the Settlement. After a brisk walk through the soft pastel corridors, they entered a room that was in stark contrast to the silent halls. The white lights glared off white computer consoles and mechanical noise reverberated between machines. Sitting among this machine chaos was a young woman, calmly sipping coffee and reading reports.

Frank cleared his throat twice before she looked up.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, surprised and stood hastily up, "You'll have to excuse me and the mess." Her hand swept the entire room. "We have been pretty busy!"

"Barbara, this is Commander Peterson and her aide. They've come.." Frank began but was cut off.

"Oh, Commander Peterson, we all have heard so much about you!" Barbara pumped Kamara's hand vigorously,

a wide smile lighting up her face.

"Why thank you very much." Kamara replied, flattered, "And you are?"

"Barbara Vernose, Communication's expert. I developed the basis for our present project," she replied proudly.

"Yes, I've read your papers." Kamara replied, smiling, "But I'm afraid we can't discuss this further." She then described the events that had forced them to come to the Settlement early. When she finished, Barbara rustled through a stack of printouts and soon found what she wanted. She handed it to Kamara. Commander Peterson frowned as she read it and then handed it to Dave. She noticed that Frank had sneaked back to his duties while they had been talking.

Frowning, Barbara said, "It's not going as successful as we hoped, I'm afraid."

Worried, Dave asked, "Do you think that the Overlords have intercepted your transmission bursts and used them to zero in on the Settlement?"

"That was our greatest concern from the onset, we have tried to vary our transmissions but the latest attack on your ship confirms that they have intercepted our transmissions." Barbara turned to Kamara, "Are you familiar with what we are trying to do, Commander Peterson?"

"Somewhat yes, I have read the reports. You are trying to contact aliens."

"Yes and no," Barbara walked over to a large screen. "We have built an advanced communication station on the far side of the planet." A picture of the Settlement came on the screen then moved off to the side as the picture slowly zeroed in on a small communication station.

"This is the most technologically advanced piece of equipment ever created. Totally automated, it can send short bursts of binary coded messages at speeds reaching Lightspeed-One."

Kamara exclaimed, "But that's not supposed to be possible!"

"And the Earth is flat!" Dave stated sarcastically.

Kamara gave him a chilling smile.

Barbara interjected, hoping to stave off an argument.

"The red crystals we have mined on this planet for power, have also proven useful in achieving these remarkable speeds. It would take weeks to explain how it works and we don't have that time." Barbara paused and called up a star chart, "This is a view of the edge of our galaxy. Some four centuries ago, as the environmental problems on Earth reached their peak, ships of people left the dying planet. They were all hoping to find suitable worlds for colonization. Earth never heard from them again. It has been assumed that these ships were all destroyed. We are working on the assumption that a least one of these ships survived and found a new world."

Barbara called another image onto the screen, "We've been transmitting towards this sector because some months ago, we received an unusual radio disturbance from that direction. It could be no more than solar noise but...this is the message. We hope that they will receive it and help us."

On the screen was printed a simple message pleading for aid.

Dave said softly, "There's been no reply?"

"None." It was said with finality, like the closing of the crypt door.

Commander Peterson let out a slow breath, awed by what she had heard. "We have another problem." She pulled three computer cards from a pocket. "This is a copy of the information in our ship's computers." She looked at Dave and motioned for him to take over.

"Our systems were attacked by a computer virus. It wiped out the specs on the Dubian project," Dave finished with a grimace.

"If we put it into the 5760, we should be able to recall half." Barbara replied. She and Dave hurriedly began to work.

"I'll leave you two to your work. Lt. Britefield, report to me when you get anything." She smiled as she walked out. It was like talking to air when two technicians got together.

V

She made her way through labyrinth of hallways and corridors, making only two wrong turns as she made her way to her room. The door opened to her voice print onto a small, dark cubicle.

"Lights," she commanded. The bright lights came on, revealing a bed, dining area and small lavatory.

She winced in the brightness. "Dim," she ordered and the lights softened to a dusk-like brightness. She stepped through the small door and into the shower. The water felt warm and refreshing, it was a novelty to have real water for a shower after years of sonic showers. After her shower, she dressed in a loose robe and got a cup of tea from the dining service. She activated her view-portal and looked out onto the harsh Settlement landscape. Constant storms raced across the horizon, throwing dust and crystal particles into the air, giving everything a shimmering glow. The planet was as beautiful as it was lethal to humans. Many had died when the first protection domes had ruptured. The human race has come so far, struggled so much, she thought.

"We can't be the only ones, we can't!" she finished out loud, pounding her fist on the wall. With a sigh, she closed the port and turned off the lights, trying to regain needed sleep.

Four hours later the door buzzer sounded insistently.

"What?" she mumbled groggily and fumbled her way to the door, not fully awake. Dave stood there with a big grin on his face.

"Oh sorry, sleeping?" he said without the least bit of remorse on his voice when he saw her sleepy blink and rumpled red hair escaping from the barrette at the back of her head. "I

wouldn't have awakened you if it wasn't important... We got it back!" he exclaimed. His smile fell when he didn't get a reaction.

"I'm not fully awake yet. Got what back?" Kamara

began, then, realizing what he was talking about, gave a whoop of joy. "Dave!" She gave him a hug. "That's great!"

She danced around the room. "Let me get dressed and I'll meet you in the communication's lab."

She quickly got dressed and hurried to the lab. As she entered, Barbara led her to a seat.

"We got ninety percent of the Dubian project data back," Barbara said with a smile. "I've never seen this type of virus before. We can't seem to neutralize it. I'm afraid it might have infected the Settlement's systems." She frowned and began to pace.

Dave announced, "We'll have to inform the Council right away. If the virus takes hold here, it could alert the Overlords to our exact location."

"Maybe that's what they wanted all along! They

infected my ship and knew we would come here. That's why we got away from them so easily!" Kamara said with growing horror. "Where are the Council chambers?"

"I'll take you there." Barbara replied leading them out into the hall and to the Council chambers.

VI

Kamara Peterson waited impatiently in the reception room off the Council chambers. The room was a cheerful color with soft chairs and paintings of earth-like landscapes along the walls. Kamara only saw what a fool she had been. It was useless to berate herself now; now that it was too late. Her ship had gotten away too easily from the Overlord cruiser. She had played into their hands, had led the Overlords to the last stronghold of the human

race. As she paced, she could feel the walls of the trap tighten around her.

"Damn!" she exclaimed out loud.

"It's not your fault, I should have picked up on the fact that it would be our systems that would infect the Settlement once we landed." Dave began.

"No, I was in charge, it was my responsibility and now it's my fault." Kamara wanted to weep with fury, how could she have been so stupid? So blind?

The door of the Council chamber opened and a young attendant stepped out. "The Council will see you now," she said politely and led them into the room.

The Council chamber was a large room, the largest Kamara had seen so far. A large table sat in the middle with fifteen chairs surrounding it. In those chairs, sat the ruling government of the Settlement. The men and women ranged from middle age to elderly.

Head Councilor Matthews stood as the three entered. "Welcome Commander Peterson, we are all glad that you have come."

"Councilor, I don't think you will be glad to see me after I tell you this," Kamara began, choosing her words carefully. Dave and Barbara had been given seats off to the side of the room. Barbara gave her a smile of encouragement.

Kamara began by outlining the events of the attack and the discovery of the computer virus and the thought that the base was already infected. She then told them how it was her ship who had infected the Settlement, sealing their fate. "I see now that the virus was planted in my ship so that it would be spread to the Settlement. We suspected that the Overlords knew about the exodus and were trying to find the Settlement. We had no idea that they could use the virus to trace my ship to you."

"The virus can become active at any time and eventually shut down all of the Settlement's systems. Once the virus is activated, the Overlords will know your exact location and launch an attack force, if one hasn't been

launched already. You must act now and begin evacuating the people." She finished emphatically.

"How do we know that the virus will become activated at all? It might be a trick to lure us off the planet and into an Overlord trap. Perhaps the incident on your ship was an isolated one." one council member asked quietly. The rest murmured their agreement.

Dave jumped up and demanded, "How can you sit by and wait for the last remnants of the human race to be slaughtered? The Overlords have no use for human slaves anymore. We will be annihilated!" He finished heatedly, "Listen to Commander Peterson before it is too late!"

"Do you have undeniable proof that supports what you say?" Matthews asked. Kamara motioned for Barbara to give the computer cards to him.

"This is what we have discovered, along with a tentative timetable of events." Barbara said as she handed them to him.

"Thank you, we will discuss this with all due haste and inform you of our decision." With that they were dismissed to the reception room.

"Damn bureaucrats," Dave mumbled as he sat down.

VII

Two hours later the door to the Counsel chambers finally opened. The same young attendant motioned them into the room. Kamara stood stiffly, waiting for their decision. The fifteen councilors looked tired and pale.

"We have decided to act on your information," Councilor Matthews stated. "The evacuation process will begin immediately. The Director assures me that we will be ready to leave in three days time. The Exodus has begun," he finished resolutely but there was a catch in his voice.

Later, as Commander Peterson and Lt. Britefield walked down one of the formerly deserted hallways in the Settlement, people hurried about preparing to leave.

"The ships will be ready to lift off thirteen hours before scheduled," Dave said softly.

"Good," Kamara replied. "I hope it is soon enough." The lights in the corridor flickered and died.

"The virus has been activated!" Dave exclaimed as they broke into a run for the communication's lab.

In the communication's lab, Barbara and a score of technicians were frantically at work, trying to neutralize the virus.

Barbara looked up as they entered. "It's no use, the virus has infected over half of our systems. We are trying to keep it from shutting down the planetary shield." She angrily punched some buttons.

VII

The four large ships from the Settlement lifted off behind schedule. Last minute delays had cost them valuable time. Commander Peterson sat at the helm of her ship. Hasty repairs had patched up the major damage but many of the ship's secondary systems were out.

"Scanner report." She ordered.

"There are no signs of Overlord cruisers in this sector."

"Good. Maintain course and speed. Get me the Captains of the other ships on the screen." Four faces popped onto the screen, "Ladies and Gentlemen, our present course will take us within close range of the sun. Stay in formation and keep your ship's shields raised and there should be no danger." Kamara finished and the screen went blank.

"We have a minor systems failure on the Star Gazer."

Kamara responded, "Tell them to compensate and inform me if it gets any worse."

The red alert claxon sounded.

Lt. Burns announced, "Overlord ship sighted on an intercept course."

"Plot an intercept course, shield the other ships." Kamara ordered. Then to the communication's

officer, "Inform the other ships to increase speed. Tell them to..."

"Three other cruisers have now appeared and are firing on the last two ships. The Farragut and the Whirlwind have sustained direct hits in their engines and guidance control sections."

Kamara ordered, "Get us over there! Return fire!"

"Damage reports coming in from the other ships.

The Whirlwind has lost all guidance control. The Farragut has sustained damage in the aft sections... Ma'am! The Morushi has reported a total systems failure due to the activation of the virus!"

The situation looked hopeless as more and more Overlord ships appeared and began firing on the convoy. The ship was blasted from behind.

"Shields holding, down by forty five percent!"

"Continue firing! Maneuver between the Whirlwind and the Overlord cruiser." Before she could finish, the screen erupted into a glaring white fireball.

The crew gazed in stunned silence as the light receded. Someone whispered hoarsely, "That was the Whirlwind."

Damn, Kamara thought. "There are too many of them. Get us out of here! Have the other ships follow. Plot a parabolic course around the sun. Use it to shield us from the Overlord cruisers."

The remaining three ships limped off towards the sun. It's fireball brightness blinding the screen sensors. The protective shield lowered slowly over the view screen; and a computer generated image of their course appeared.

"Hull temperature, 1198 degrees and rising."

Utter silence engulfed the command center. Kamara could almost see the tension in the air before her. One false move and they would be sent crashing into the sun.

"Hull temperature, 2050 degrees."

Kamara wiped the beads of sweat from her forehead.

"Commander! The Overlord cruisers are in pursuit!"

"On screen!"

The Overlord cruisers were gaining on them; as she watched, one fired on the Morushi, pushing it violently off course. They watched in horror as it careened into the Farragut, exploding. Large pieces of debris flew in every direction. The skeletal frames of the two ships went plummeting into the sun.

A cry of horror escaped everyone's lips.

"No..oh no!" Kamara whispered hoarsely. In the silence that followed, soft weeping and moans of despair could be heard. Everyone began talking at once.

"QUIET!" Kamara ordered with some difficulty. "We must go on." Clenching her fists, she said, "If the rest of the human race is destroyed, then the others will have died in vain. We can't let that happen!" She paused and took a deep breath to steady herself. "Give me full power. Take evasive action. Increase speed!"

"Lightspeed-3... Lightspeed-4.5
...Lightspeed-5."

The ship steadily increased its speed but it wasn't enough. The Overlord cruisers began to close the gap.

"Overlord ships are closing!"

"Fire all aft weapons. Full charge."

The ship gave a small shudder as the batteries were emptied. An Overlord ship exploded.

"Direct hit."

Someone cheered. The feeling of triumph was cut short as the ship lurched violently.

"Direct hit in the engine core! Guidance controls are frozen!"

Kamara stood. With the engine core destroyed, they were dead in space. The ship hurled helplessly towards the burning fireball of the sun.

"Warning! Impact in sixty seconds. Warning!!" the computer buzzed loudly.

Kamara blinked back tears as the ship sped towards their doom. They were going to die

and with their deaths so died the hope of the human race. As the computer counted down the final seconds for impact, she cried for herself, for her crew, and most of all for the future man would never have.

Epilogue.

From millions of miles away, the message sped across space. The communications station at the Settlement, whirred as the message rapidly flashed on the screen.....

Transmission received. Will send help.

<Untitled> Chris Ilardi

I crawled on my hands and knees
through the debauched landscape to reach you.

I left a trail of bloody sickness on the snow.

I experienced lost-love paranoia for
days on end.

How can I concentrate with knives in
my back?

Te Psychotic Lover KAKO

Sometimes I feel like I'm deranged,
or perhaps I'm just trapped in a cage.
Either way,
I feel my time has come,
it's time for me to go insane.

My how lovely your milk-white neck is,
but wouldn't it be prettier snapped?
Oh look at those gorgeous long legs,
a nice clean break in the right
would be really fine.
What a pretty smile you have,
wouldn't it be nicer with a fat lip,
no actually it would be quite appealing,

with a few broken teeth.

I see that you are growing tense,
why are you afraid of me?
I'm perfectly harmless,
I couldn't hurt a fly.
But then again,
you're not a fly, are you?
So I guess I could consider it,
if you insist on my going through with it.

What? You'd like to leave,
now really, that isn't very nice.
How would you feel if I took you by the hand,
and led you down to my funeral pyre?
Now you're calling the cops,
oh no, not that again.

I can feel it coming on again,
it's much stronger this time.
But don't be frightened,
I can control it,
once my desires are fulfilled.
My feelings towards you are growing by the
minute,
and my love for you is undying.

However if you speak harshly to me once more,
I feel my hate will grow stronger,
and we will have to part.
For I am not yet ready to go
to the place where dead people be.

That's much better,
a pleasant smile is nice,
perhaps a good fuck would help.
What? You're denying me your passion,
then I will simply deny you your life.

The Mills Mansion

by Joe Durham

The Mills Mansion
Purposely resting on a hill
Overlooking the Hudson river,

Is a 19th century
Image of Greek Revival
And railroad wealth.

This estate is sacred,
Not for its historic value
Or architectural integrity,
But for the long, gently sloping
Hill, which in Winter, is
A mecca for the
Sledding culture.

Alison, Jimmy and I belong
Today, with our five dollar
Plastic sled,
We have come to celebrate
The rites of the first snow
Of the year.

Alison and I take turns
Sliding with Jimmy
Down the hill, while
Navigating the
Maze of the
Faithful.

We take turns
Getting snow
In our faces and
Down our necks.

Our son's energy flows
Like the Hudson river and
His face
Radiates with innocent joy.

The air is filled with
Addicting laughter,
Which we inhale
Deep
Into our souls.



**Dawn in Massachusetts
(Birth)
by Dave Tenyck**

...darkness descended toward the empty street, falling faintly through the sky, and settling in formless pools in the gutters of the quiet town. Mounted on the crests of advancing waves of night, it drifted slowly between rows of sleeping houses, interrupted by the glow of streetlight and relaxed by grey moonbeams, but never diminished or obscured. Above the veiled street, in an open window near the maple trees he stood, the thick Spring mist descending all about him, moistening the thin black shirt he wore, and gathering in a transparent film upon his face. Wreaths of smoke spiraled starward from the cigarette which he held limply in the loose fingers of his hand, and as they climbed, sustained by the cool Spring air, they thrust their insubstantial fingers into the heavy mist and played amongst the scattering of Winters paling shades. The moisture drifted in rolling currents towards the ground, and torn remnants of the past he perceived faintly, shadows only, falling with it noisily into the night. A wall of formless faces, they held in a lingering embrace, and

whispered scattered lines of tales thrice told into the moon grey mist. In changing choruses they spoke, muttering in the voice of the parents and the children and of the ever living, repeating words which passed him mutely in the cool night air and reached his ears as echo only. Beyond, the darkness settled on the time worn surfaces of the rocks and rivers of the earth, and dripping from the dense sky he felt himself descending as it fell, a thin thread in a soulless shroud which slowly wrapped its broad black arms around the world. Drawing back from the window he released the damp night air from his body with a hollow sigh and let his eyes slid slowly shut. He was all the time submitting to the trunkless thoughts which advanced upon him endlessly, and standing blindly with his head inclined toward the dusty floor he felt the waning images pass silently into the pervasive universe of night. A bird called once from the trees outside the window and his eyes reopened to gaze at the direction of the sound. In the sky above, the darkest hour of the morning was beginning, the stone gray street below hung dimly in the mist, a soft breeze swept between the swaying branches of the trees, and he was there. Alone.

Advancing, he leaned outside the window and sucked the night air through the hot filter of his cigarette. His stale hands came to rest upon the window ledge, and he looked down upon the street, silver and black beneath him in the half light, as he released the smoke from his lungs and let the withered butt fall from his fingers to the ground below. His pale brown eyes goped outward restlessly, sovereigns of the still world which lay sprawled in sleep beneath them. In the shadows the tulips and the roses were slowly being born, and the air which swirled about him softly was heavy with the fragrances of Spring. The knotted branches of the trees which reached toward him had been *bathed* dark brown by the wet kisses of the night, the windows of the houses which peered at him through the shadows were black, and overhead the fading stars were clustered

silently together. He straightened slowly, leaning against the paneled wall to support his back, and as he stood the wood felt coarse against his skin--stiff and awkward like the body of a stranger. He looked once more toward the street, then leaned lazily against the wall and turned to heed the calling of the world inside.

Behind him in the bosom of the deeply shadowed room she lay, stretched upon the bed, her chest rising and falling gently beneath a thin blanket, swelling and subsiding like the surface of the sea in the Summer. From the front wall where he stood he could hear the soft sigh of her breath mingling with the sighing of the breezes in the trees, and he could smell the faint smell of her body and her cloths as it blended with the heavier odor of the thick Spring air. He raised his dry hand to the narrow base of his nose, inhaling the smell of stale tobacco deeply, and thinking of the years that had passed without her. The waning night hung lazily in the room about them, sleeping there as she had said once, long ago, sleeping in the cluttered room, and slumbering in the folds of time which lay between them. The early morning mist had clouded the memories of all he had once been. His tongue was now tucked deeply in his mouth, the air he breath was like liquid in his lungs, his soar stomach churned, and beneath them all his heart was beating, slowly beating, slowly pushing the thick red blood from vein to vein. He gazed into the shadowy void, peering over the soulless shapes which filled the empty hours between dusk and dawn, and fearing that his heart would not beat on without her. The thick air had been softened and sprinkled lightly by the morning mist, and saw her through the shadows vaguely, a distant shape, soulless like the rest, apart from him forever.

But was it not she who had entered his life after he'd lost the best of it? And wasn't it she who'd embrace him when he thought none would ever take him in their arms again? Those days were still the dear ones, and at times they seem not far ago. And all that stood between

them still were two short steps to take--one into the shadows and one onto the dark bed where she lay, waiting amidst distant dreams for him to come. Beside her the wrinkled sheets were warm and the partial disarray was pleasantly familiar. Her soft arms were the ones which had held him when he was a bold young man, and hers were the eyes which beheld him once in glory. And yet how often had he strayed and wandered from them aimlessly? Away only to come again-- over the sweat stained shirt which lay discarded on the floor, past the wooden chair where her stockings and her pants were thrown, over the dangling alarm clock cord, and a careful skip onto the lumpy mattress where she lay. It was four cigarettes past four in the morning, and the east rim of the night sky was beginning to lose its grip upon the world. He closed the window quietly, and in a step a shuffle and a jump he had landed on the bed beside her. Reclining back upon the mattress cautiously he lifted his hands to twine her soft brown hair his fingers. Her sleeping face was turned toward him on the pillow, and he laid beside her sleepily, gazing distantly into the blindness of its ignorant eyes.

Alone. Yes. It seemed so different from the word he had used once when all he'd loved left him. And now, with the pale white light of the morning spilling into the somber sky, it seemed much more alive, and a thousand times more terrible. The dawn was advancing slowly from the east, pulling the dreary day westward on its shoulders, and forcing him free of the night's dark embrace. From the black branches in the shadows, behind the wooden walls and sealed windows, the birds began to sing their morning songs in choruses, and the waking world began to stir in its collective sleep. He rolled onto his side and pulled the thin green blanket over his shoulder. His callused hand was resting lightly on her chest, and in the shadows he could feel her heart beat steadily, beckoning him onward into morning. It was a soft and reassuring call and he could feel his body, tamely obeying, dragging him slowly downward into sleep. He

gave her his last waking glance with dimming eyes, and thought he saw in the shadows of her sleeping face the thousand paths on which his soul had wandered. It was all unchanging like the changing days and nights which wandered by, and it was still she who lay beside him in the half life, and when he closed his eyes and listened her voice was still the one which reached his ears most often.

INSIDE

In my mind I can be anything.
I am the wind softly whispering words to the one I love.
I am the stars keeping the hopes and secrets of my friends.
The Earth I am, revolving around everything and everyone.
Every emotion I feel.
Every thought I think.
Mention the impossible
succeed and make it conquerable.
Wandering lonely through this life
I realize what pain is.
I know how to feel hurt and confused.
Pondering what happiness is look deep in to me.
You will feel the power of my inner beauty.

By Julie Spann

NOTHING IN YOUR HEART

My feelings mean nothing in your heart
My heart pounds for you and it doesn't matter
I kiss you and you don't notice
I blow smoke in your face and you yell
The tears fall and you feel no pity

Whiskey Tango



You don't love me and you never will
The closest I'll be to you is in my dreams
Touching you is a sensation that would fulfill
my life
To see your face helps me live
To have my eyes blurred is a pain I deal with
Being alone, I survive by mere will
You make this impossible by telling me NO
Our lives parallel in a way that frightens you
with a sledgehammer you crack our unity
Mutilating my mind, while I do my body
I'm alive, because death is too easy.....

By Derek Johnson

**MY
POWERLESS
PARALYZED
HEART**

Gazing,
Grasping,
Groping -
I am not alone.

My companions
reflect
my thoughts -
my mood.

Secrets -
they share,
protect,
reveal.

The sky,
cloudless,
and empty,
mourns my heart.

The willow,

dripping,
dew,
joins my tears.

The brook,
bouncy
and boisterous,
softens my sobs.

The road,
country-fresh,
massages
my feet.

But
naught
massages
my heart.

My
powerless,
paralyzed,
heart,

weighted
by
worlds of
pain,

tattered
by
torrential
rain -

I breathe
the frenzy
of
whirlwind,

while seeking
the harps
of
angels.

I storm
beyond

winter
winds,

while searching
for gardens
of
summer.

I blaze
with
volcanic
fury,

while thirsting
for one
cool
drink -

I breathe
the frenzy
of
whirlwind.

But
naught
massages
my heart.

My
powerless,
paralyzed
heart -

I flicker
with the
twinkle
of stars,

as I
trail
the tip
of creation.

I harbor
humanity,
abort

reality,

as I
saturate
galaxies
of solitude.

I lead
the
innumerable
lonely.

as I
echo the
haunts of
the lost.

Drenched -
with disdain,
I resound
with silence -

I breathe
the frenzy
of
whirlwind.

But
naught
massages
my heart.

My
powerless,
paralyzed
heart,

mourned
by only
the
sky,

the
cloudless,
empty
sky.

- Patricia
Smith-Pomales

Downtown Poughkeepsie Chris Iardi

I gaze out my window at the
white covered city below and am
content to know that the ice will
melt under an orange sun--slowly
revealing its naked truth

Telephone lines hung heavy
with snow and conversation
as they stretch from pole to pole.

The benches in the park where
we sat in the summer months
are now smothered under a blanket of powder

Crack-pipe chapped lips

Frozen prostitutes--How's business?

The homeless need a hand out in the
worst way.

Jehovah's Witness goes door to door-
You must really love Jesus.

I'll celebrate myself once spring arrives.

The Amber Shades of Twilight

Story I

The birds of prey, the children at play
Were all heading for home
The streets became clear, 'cause sundown is
near,
And the streetlights will let it be known.
And over the hills, as he toils over bills,
He watches the last of the light.
As the sun goes away, he dismisses the day
Through the amber shades of twilight.

Story II

In her small barn-house loft, her youngest son
coughed
And tears swelled in her eyes as she wept.
For with each passing breath, he grew closer to
death
As over the earth, the night crept.
How long 'til the growth, would take over his
youth?
She hoped he had enough courage to fight,
For she hadn't the dough to ensure that he'd
grow,
Through the amber shades of twilight.

Story III

As she pressed with her thighs, she heard her
newborn's cries,
A new human had entered the world.
Oh, the young infant's tears were heaven to their
ears
As their patience and wonder unfurled.
For the child, they cared, as the sun
disappeared,
And they swaddled the baby in white.
The nurse watched the sleeper yawn next to her
keeper,
In the amber shades of twilight.

Story IV

As the world falls to black, know the light will
be back
In the morning right before the dawn.
But for now I am captured, by the sky's lovely
rapture
In the period after the sun's gone.
Life and death have been done, with or without
the sun,
And 'twill happen again every night.
And though life's sometimes tragic, we must
look to the magic,
Like the amber shades of twilight.

- Mike Pappagallo



Windows

to my mind, windows from my heart,
connecting to each other and clinging to the
screens of consciousness and waiting for the
truth. Trying to find reality in the eyes of the
absurd.

And Grasping...

Grasping

and Gripping

and Grabbing

and Groping for the necks of the

unaware, warranting the ability to drag them
into the threshold and devour them. Thus
ending the dual perception of their existence,
and opening my window that much wider.

- Mike Pappagallo

Trestle

"The trestle upstream is gone, but the
river is still around. So am I" *

Charlie is gone. I can still remember
his Casanova smile and slicked back hair as he
would roll down the hood of his convertible

and drive as fast as he could down Snider
Street.

He's gone now, and so is his
convertible, which went with him over the side
of the trestle in a twisted, mangled, end.

I still remember the old "Barlick Store,"
on the east side of the trestle. Why it was Mr.
Barlick himself, who cut the ribbon on the
newly built trestle. Mr. Barlick was always
smiling as he would sell his goods to the
neighbors, always on credit. I remember how
he always had two extra quarters around for
Sammy and I, and he would always offer them
with a wink and a smile.

Mr. Barlick is gone now. Time had its
way with him, and disposed of him uselessly.
Mrs. Barlick had to sell the shop, she couldn't
keep up with the payments. She's gone too.

Sammy is gone. Moved on "to a better
place," as the minister put it. I can still
remember sitting on the trestle, fishing pole in
hand, listening to Sammy map out his whole
future. He wanted to discover a cure for
cancer. Only thing is, he couldn't come up with
a cure fast enough, and it consumed his body
and ended his life.

Amelia is gone too. She, who was to be
my wife, is gone. I loved her. I will always
remember sitting at the river's edge, watching
the sun set beyond the trestle, singing her
favorite song to her. I still sing that song, only
now I sing it to a plot of dirt and a headstone.
From the cemetery I can still see the sun set
beyond the trestle. The trestle which she ended
her life by jumping off of.

But now... "the trestle upstream is gone,
but the river is still around. So am I" *

* Line taken from "The Body," by Stephen King.

- Mike Pappagallo

ON THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE MUPPETS TODAY

by Joe Marranca
Spring, 1994

Warning: The following update may be disturbing to some readers.

It has recently been called to my attention that the Muppets, the group of characters so popular way back in the seventies, have experienced a slight, but nevertheless apparent, fallout in the attention of most Americans. This piece of writing, therefore, will serve to update the general public on the present whereabouts and circumstances involving the Muppets.

Kermit the Frog, after being fired from a Hollywood McDonald's (where he had been employed for a period of five months), eventually found his way to the Okefenoke Swamps, where he built himself a hovel beside a slimy bog. Unfortunately, he was soon trapped by a Dutch/Eskimo fisherman named Ed, shipped to France, and served--for Queen Elizabeth--beside lentils and on a bed of rice in a cafe just outside of Nice.

After the last Muppet movie, Miss Piggy began to pass through an entire string of jobs. That spring, she had been employed by a truck-driving service located near Annapolis. This occupation, however, soon ended when she broadsided a Wendy's in Tucson. After legal proceeding concluded, Piggy was hired by a 24-hour diner in Denver, but was soon fired when she cast an entire saucepan of hot sauerkraut at a lingering derelict (who turned out to be Dan Rather). She is presently the night manager at a Jimmy Dean sausage factory in Spokane, Washington.

Fozzie the Bear was hired to replace Smokey (his second cousin, twice removed), but was rapidly dismissed after having been found

puffing a reefer in a leaf pile in Yellowstone National Park.

Gonzo suffered a nervous breakdown after Clerice, his favorite hen, was kidnapped by Frank Perdue and Perdue's distant cousin, Ross Perot. Nevertheless, Gonzo quickly recovered and got a job as a coat valet at a hotel in New York City. Eventually, he underwent plastic surgery and moved back to Hollywood, where he is currently involved in both a photography shoot for L'Oreal and modeling for Maybeline.

Beaker was quickly hired by Pyrex, but was laid off when he subsequently cracked. His bosses claimed that he couldn't take the heat.

Chuck, or whatever the name of that lab guy who was always with Beaker is (in actuality, Dr. Bunsen Honeydew), got married, contracted syphilis, moved to Duluth Minnesota, and now chemically prepares new and unusual varieties of fat-free semi-firm cheeses for a subsidiary of the Kraft company.

The rats, those best known from The Muppets Take Manhattan for their frying pan rendition of The Ice Capades, spent a period of four years in a state of relative unemployment. Upon their locating a gig in the suburbs of Chicago, they were subsequently poisoned by an Italian, French-Canadian immigrant by the name of Bjorn.

Animal was incarcerated and treated for rabies in early 1991. Eventually, he was discovered by the Guns & Roses drummer Axl Rose, who built a pen for him and decided to breed him with a neighbor's collie.

The Swedish Chef, after failing out of the Culinary Institute of America, hitchhiked to Maine, where he rented an apartment in Portland. He resides there still, paying for his rent with the money he earns as a dishwasher in a cheap, suburban Chinese restaurant.

Ralph the Dog was involved in a biking accident in late 1990. Apparently, in an effort to avoid a wandering poodle, he had swerved sharply across three lanes of traffic. His harley

was struck by an oncoming Ford Festiva, and he was propelled 65 feet backward to a ravine. [The Festiva must obviously have been traveling at more than 100 miles per hour to provide such inertia]. It was at this point, witnesses said, that he began to become unstuffed.

After the filming of the last Muppet movie, all the rest of the Muppets (except for a small, rogue group of band members who eloped to southern Armenia) were riding from the studio when, in a bizarre twist of fate, their bus happened to collide with the sedentary gate of a Los Angeles nudist colony. Apparently, they liked it so much that the entire group decided to remain, and, as of the last notice, they were still there.

A Dance with Temptation

The soul strolled in innocence, basking in purity and pride. Flawless, it ambled in a willowy whisper toward the heavens. For an eternal moment, however, it feathered a fraction beyond bliss.

The thrill of a tinsilled trail eclipsed the soul's destination. Although once unblemished, the soul soon needed cleansing, as it was soiled by a walk along a muddied path. Instead of donning boots to shield itself from earthly pleasures, the soul was lured into false steps to warmth and protection.

Upon reaching the curved kingdom, the soul pondered the wet earth. It teasingly toed the ointment before succumbing to the glistening ooze. Fragile footprints soon confirmed the soul's chosen course. But with each step, it became burdened, and wallowed with the weight of its walk.

The titillating trail turned treacherous. The soul stumbled into temptation, and crumpled upon contact with its tempter. The soul discovered that the shiny substance had

tarnished; the alluring ooze and shine were only smut and grime.

The soul quaked in its squalor; it sought refuge from remorse. Tired with struggle, it yawned. Yielding to sorrow, it yelled.

The soul tasted tears, paled with pain, and felt fear. It surmised that with misguided merit, the soul became disjointed from spirit.

The lumbering soul wavered between now and remembrance. The wet earth that covered it eventually crusted, then dusted away.

The cleansing calmed the soul. Renewed, the soul emerged and sought the sky. It befriended brilliant colors.

No longer jaded, but shaded in a spectrum of hues, the soul spiraled heavenward.

- Patricia Smith-Pomales

JUST DO IT

Just do it.
Just give up.
You already have and you know it.
You can't fight anymore.
What are you fighting for anyway?
To survive maybe.
The struggle is endless.
The drug use is killing you.
So just do it.
Do you really want to live in a world like this?
Fix up, you know deep down it's helping you.
It lets you observe what no else could possibly see.
The loss of control, the loss of reality, and the loss of a
life, your life.
But, is it really a loss?
So just do it.

Suicide is an easy answer, the solution to your problems.

The problems are more complicated than the solution.

Help has been offered, but you won't accept.

A lost cause, a waste of time.

The truth is so real, but don't accept it.

Just do it.

By Derek Johnson

Poetry

Poetry is anything
with a meaning,
with a reason,
with a little rhythm or
a little rhyme.

It could be a single word
with a meaning in itself,
or just a thought
that comes to mind.

A thought, a mind, a word, a rhyme
that's all you really need...
that and something to write it
down with.

-a poet at heart-

CRONICLES OF SATILE: Part 2

by Jason Crandall

The road and the trees that lined it were weak images that he was barely aware of, things that he could neither focus on nor entirely dismiss either. He felt as though he was not there, not anywhere really, just floating in a black abyss that he was just emerging from. He knew he was moving, the ghostly images of trees that went by him told him that. But he couldn't tell where he was apart from being in a

wood somewhere on a dirt path that lead into a black nothingness. Lights! Lights in the nothingness, but they were above him, beyond the trees growing bright then dim with an impossible irregularity. Another sign of the delirious state he was in, but also another string to grasp onto reality with. It was night, and those were stars. It was hard to think, a thick haze had settled over him while he had been in the darkness and his head felt as though it were filled with cotton. Despite this he would break free of it, that he assured himself of!

He was walking! He was sure of it! He could feel the steady, but staggering movement of his legs. Another victory! He was starting to become aware of great fatigue, he must have been walking for quite some time. He could feel the rest of his body, too. His arms listless at his sides, occasionally coming up to grab the support of a passing tree. No. His right arm came up to support him, the other never moved. He did not think it could, something was wrong with it. Maybe it was broken, no matter he would deal with it when the time came. The haze was definitely lifting, he no longer felt as though he was traveling through the thickest of mud, he could think more clearly although not by much. His surroundings revealed their secrets to him as though he had just looked. He was stumbling along a narrow dirt path in the middle of some temperate forest. The wood was not particularly thick, but he was amazed that he had not come to find himself totally lost in the middle of no where. A light breeze swept past him from his left, 'that would be the east' he thought, placing it's direction by the stars. So he was traveling south, if only he knew where he was that might mean something. It was warm, the breeze a light caress to his exhaustion. Summer, he judged, or late spring. Then noticed the flowers and shrubbery for the first time and chided himself for a fool. Obviously he was not fully out of his state yet.

Delirious or not though, he had enough control to finally stop his mindless trudging. When he did, however, he found he did not have

the strength to stand. He fell into a tree next to him and slumped to the ground. He clawed at the tree trying to get back on his feet, now was definitely not the time for a rest! But it was no use with one hand and legs that could barely move, perhaps using his other arm would give him enough strength. So he moved to see what he could do about his left arm, but when he looked he found nothing! His left arm was not there! He clenched his fist tightly, digging his nails into his palm, and willed himself to remain calm. What ever had happened to his arm had happened a long time ago, the wound was well healed over about halfway down from the shoulder to the elbow. Obviously since he could do nothing about it he dismissed his lost arm and looked over the rest of person, hoping not to find anything else missing. He was dressed solely in rags that might have been something else at some time, but he could not tell what. Apart from his attire he seemed to be carrying no other possessions, including no coin but that was a problem for some other time. He was covered in old scars and wounds, some of which ached badly. 'So many' he thought. No wonder he was missing an arm, he was lucky it wasn't more. There was no doubt in his mind he had been some kind of warrior, his large build and the fact that he had walked all this way in the state he was in without collapsing only added confirmation. He only hoped that whatever enemies had done this to him were dead now for he was in no shape to defend himself.

Other than being very dirty and having cut up feet from walking bare foot the whole way he seemed to be all right. The haze had almost completely lifted, and sitting for the short time he had replenished some of his strength. With great effort he raised himself up onto his feet, ignoring the sharp pain of numerous cuts being ground in with dirt. He stood there holding the tree he had lain against. In the distance he could hear many night time creatures that were still out looking for food and decided that it would be safest to start

moving once more. Walking was hard at first but once the rhythm took him he was well on his way.

Before traveling for ten minutes a flickering halo of fire light outlined the silhouette of a high wall to the south, directly in front of the path. 'A city' he thought 'towns never have walls that high and fortresses have them much higher'. As he slowly made his way onto a small plain surrounding the structure, he was amazed to discover it was indeed a town! The whole thing was much too small to be a city, but the walls were so high?! With battlements and towers. What would constitute such things here? A war. It had to be. But who were they fighting, and why? Questions that would assuredly be answered inside.

From where he stood he could see a well traveled road running to the east from the town and a heavy gate meeting it. He worked his way around to the gates, which were closed for the night. They were massive oak doors, banded with thick iron and no doubt a foot thick themselves. They stood at least ten feet tall, curving inward at the top and the wall was maybe ten feet taller than that. At either side of the gate two burning torches hanging in sconces nearly blinded his night vision.

"Ho, there!" a voice called from atop the wall. "What be ye doing out so late friend, and traveling by yerself. Mighty risky, that."

"I've lost my way." He responded in a thoughtful voice. "I'm quite tired and hungry. If I might be allowed to enter your cit-, town I would be very grateful."

"Who's that at the gate Mike, it's awfully late for more arrivals." another man appeared at the wall carrying a small lantern. He could see them now that his eyes had adjusted to the light. They were men of middle age wearing full chainmail garb with a symbol on their blue surcoats that he did not recognize. Which was no large surprise since he remembered little of anything.

"Say. What's wrong with ye friend? You sound as if the angel of death himself has

caught up with ye. Dannil go open the gates." Mike turned back to the man in the road with concern on his face. The poor fellow looked as though he had been to hell and back, pale as anyone he had ever seen, only ripped rags for clothing, haggard as a skeleton, and just as lively looking. Yet his eyes were filled with a fire that spoke of a will that had overcome much. Imagining what this man must have gone through before he had gotten here made Mike shiver, he did not want to think about it.

He never answered Mike, he just stood there and waited for Dannil to open the gates. Once that was done Mike climbed down the ladder from the battlements and joined Dannil at the gates to greet their visitor. Bent over slightly from exhaustion, he slowly limped through the gates and over to where Mike and Dannil both stood. Once he entered the light of Dannil's lantern Mike and Dannil both saw that his left arm was missing. Dannil let out a small gasp, Mike only stared.

"May I ask what town I am in?" he stopped, glaring at the two of them. "And where I might stay for the night, mind I have little coin."

Mike collected his thoughts, "Yer in Carnor, Sir. And I believe that the Bear's Cave is still open, it's just down the road on yer right. Ye should be able to stay there for only three copper." Dannil seemed to have recovered as well.

"Yep. The Bear's Cave is a good tavern with better ale. The regulars are sure to be there, but if they give you any trouble Tess'll whip'em into shape. She'll be easy on you for sure, like a mother to everybody around here." He just nodded, and started to limp down the dirt street.

"Thank you." he said briefly as he passed.

"Say friend, what's yer name?" Mike asked the man's back. He stopped and was silent, not turning or moving whatsoever. What was his name? Suddenly it all hit him. He didn't know who he was! He couldn't

remember anything about his past, or who he might've been. All that lied in his head was general information, things that anyone might know. Desperately he tried to find something in his mind, anything that might tell him who he was. But it was useless, who ever he had once been was totally gone. He nearly shook with grief, they had even taken his identity from him. Who ever was responsible would pay! But first he had to get rid of these two idiots. He chose a simple name, one he did not intend to keep.

Mike, the guard, had stepped up behind him. Probably to see if he was all right, he had been standing there for a good minute or two. He merely spoke a single word back to the two of them.

"Forliath." He said, no more. Then began walking on toward the inn/tavern he had been directed to. Mike and Dannil stood there for a time watching him go then went back to their posts on the battlements.

'Gawking fools!' he thought to himself, looking back. They didn't even ask what had happened to him, or how he had come here. Answers he did not have, yes, but still no true guards were they. He had considered the possibility that he had been one of their scouts who had encountered trouble on a run, but it was equally possible that he was part of the enemy here and so did not mention it at all. Interesting, however, that at a time of war such a small and inexperienced guard should be used. Perhaps they were undermanned, or maybe the war had just begun. He thought the second more likely, for all around the road he walked down there were carts and horses and wagons, too many for a town this small. The place must be filled with refugees from the boarder towns of the country he was in, a logical first step in warfare to allow more room for troops and equipment. This place was probably not even near the conflict, and thus the low defense.

The town was dead, in a sense. All the lights were out in the various houses and small shops that lined the road with the shutters



closed as well, it appeared that even being this far from what was happening inspired some fear. As he weaved in and out of the many wagons and carts cluttering the road he noticed a low din of talking just up ahead and soon saw the lights marking the Bear's Cave coming up on his right. It wasn't much to look at, the porch was riddled with holes and rotten patches, the roof drooped and had almost no shingles left. It was squeezed between two large houses with the front consisting of one open door and two windows both broken at some earlier time. Any sign that had once hung there was now gone, but any fool could tell it was a tavern.

Two voices came from inside, one a husky female's, the other a young slurred male's. They were arguing about something. He stepped up the porch and entered the tavern. It was a quaint little room, no more than a dozen yards square. Placed around the room were small round wooden tables, polished and well kept. Along the walls were several pictures and wall hangings depicting average people dancing around, singing, drinking, and laughing. The floor was mopped and sturdy. It appeared to be an entirely different place. Sitting at a table in one corner at the back was a stocky fellow dressed as a farmer would be. He had red hair, a blunt face, and blue eyes. Apart from that he was very large and very drunk. He clutched a large glass tankard in his hand, swirling the ale as he stared on at the scene taking place at the bar.

At the back of the room a long polished, oak bar ran along the right side of the back wall, on the left was a door leading back into the building. The bar seemed well stocked with rows, upon rows of ale and harder drinks lined up behind the bar along a mirror that covered the wall. A large portly woman in an old dress and apron stood behind the bar cleaning it with a small cloth. She looked very much like a dwarf with her brown hair and eyes and plump, round features. But her height made her a human. She was speaking to a young man in worn, but fancy clothes, with short blonde hair

and a weak body that didn't look like it had seen much work.

"-not going to find any answers in a tankard, you know." she was saying as he entered. "If I were you I'd just start all over again. There's plenty to have out there, says I. And if you try hard enough you'll be even better off than you were before." she finished with a distinct nod of her head.

"Oooohhh! You don't undersshhtand I lossht everything. I don't ev-even have a horse an-any mooore." the young man moaned as he clutched at his face as if to hide it from the world.

"I think that idea before about killing yer shelf was pertty good. Why not try that." the large drunk spoke for the first time and laughed when the bar keep stared down her nose at him with murderous eyes. The young man only crawled deeper into himself with faint noises of crying coming from beneath his arms. They then became aware of him. The large drunk only eyed him warily while sipping at his tankard. Tess, he had assumed that she must be, came around the bar and helped the young man get up.

"Come now. Time to catch some sleep, tomorrow is another day." the two of them disappeared into the back door with Tess softly comforting him about what had happened. He stepped up to the bar and took a seat, aware all the time of the drunk's eyes on him. He was about to start a conversation with the man, hoping to get some information out of him. But he stopped dead when he saw his reflection in the mirror. The first time he had seen himself, as far as he knew, and he looked terrible. His face was so pale that had he not been himself he would have believed that he was dead if not close to it. The rest of his body was pale as well but the dirt had concealed it. He had dark brown hair that hung to his shoulders, and piercing gray eyes. His features might have been handsome at one point, but now his face was riddled with scars and cuts. His right ear was almost totally gone! What else would surprise him this night!

"Hey! I'm talking toooo you! Are you deafffff or ssshhomething! Answer me!" the drunk had gotten up and was right next to him now screaming at him and pounding the bar.

"I'm sorry." he said while turning to face the man. "I'm afraid I'm out of sorts tonight, could you repeat what you asked?"

"Humph! I asked what your name was you, you dammmn fool! Now you gonna ansshwer me or what?" the stranger certainly didn't want to start a fight with the drunk, who looked right on the verge of doing so. So tried to look docile and answered the man.

"My name's Forliath. I've com-" he was stopped in mid-sentence by the drunk's laughing.

"That's a name?!" he choked out. "Why not-" he stopped to contain himself, "Why not just call yer shelf Forlimb!! Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha!!" the man yelled as he pointed at the stranger's missing arm. The stranger clenched his fist and ground his teeth, trying to control himself. The drunk was lost in laughter, hanging over the bar and practically crying.

"I do not care for your sense of humor." he said quietly, "I would appreciate it if you would apologize." his cold stare got the attention of the drunk almost immediately. Too late did he realize his mistake.

"Oh I'll apologize. As soon as you lick my boot Forlimb!" the drunk demanded as he stood tall in front of him, glowered menacingly.

He stood up as well, pushing his stool back. He would not submit to such filth, never would he give in!

"I wouldn't even touch you! You slimy, drunken toad. You smell of dung and rot. Rats have more decency!" the red of the drunk's face grew even more crimson with fury, but a smile broke through it all. The drunk had wanted a fight. He had seen that he was weak and knew he would be easily beaten.

The drunk's right hand came down, he tried to counter but was too slow. He went flying back onto a table and fell off onto the floor. Every part of him hurt, every old wound, every scar, every muscle. His head felt as if

was going to come off. Before he could even get up he was pulled to his feet by strong hands. He saw the drunk for an instant then was punched in the stomach, the air rushed out of his lungs as his head was brought down into the drunk's knee. Pain. Anger. He saw nothing but a blinding haze, his head was about to explode, he couldn't breath. Pain lanced at him from his side, his head, his chest. Somewhere in the far distance he heard someone scream 'Stop it Sedric! Your going to kill him! Stop it!'. He could vaguely see the drunk, Sedric, leering over him, beating him. He could not stand it, such filth making a mockery of him and that same filth would kill him as well. Anger welled up inside of him, his pain fueled it. A mix of emotions, so many different feelings came up to strengthen him, to focus him.

He leapt up from the floor, leaping with all of his strength and emotion and putting it into one punch, one deadly punch. Which was more so than he realized, for when he leapt at Sedric and his fist came up to meet his attacker. It was not fist that met flesh, but fire. Out of his hand shot a blazing torrent of fire which hit and engulfed the man who was Sedric. He watched amazed as the body slumped to the ground and burned to ash. He was only barely aware of the woman Tess screaming in the back doorway and the two guards yelling out in the street, running to see what had happened.

His enemy was dead. That was all that mattered. And as he watched the burning embers start to spread fire to the floor of the inn he became aware of a new sound, a sound that seemed so familiar here and now. The sound of him laughing.

* * *

Hawkens winced again as the wagon jumped over another clump of stones in the road and he landed hard on the back railing of the wagon. Olmar, sitting beside him, grunted as the same thing happened to him and cursed when he found that his large bulk had almost

broken off the railing they were both leaning against. Hovering over them was Malcomm with more bandages and poultices for their wounds, the skill and swiftness with which he had helped Lyle was both welcome and surprising. Neither him nor the others had thought Malcomm more than a vagabond storyteller who spent most of his time in a tankard of ale, but now he was turning out to be much more.

"Kern! Billi, if you run over any more boulders your going to kill them!" Malcomm yelled over the din of crying children and galloping hooves, as he attempted for the second time to wrap a third gash on Hawkens' side. In the face of death Malcomm had taken charge and seemed more capable than him or any of the others. Of course he was only half conscious and wouldn't make much of a leader now, but that was no excuse. These people were his responsibility, not Malcomm's! He had made a mistake, he had failed them, and some of his friends had died for it. He would make up for it, not Malcomm!

"What do you expect! I can't see a damn thing up here!" Billi replied "I'll slow down."

"NO!" Malcomm screamed as he leapt past Gerald and Coro trying to comfort the children, and themselves as well. Past Lyle, the only surviving father, clutching his son and daughter tight to him as if something were about to take them away. And up to the driver's bench where Billi sat, leaning over the front railing and clutching at Billi as if to keep him from slowing the two horses that pulled their wagon.

"Don't slow down!" He commanded, while fighting to keep his balance in the crowded wagon. "You mustn't! Go faster if you can!"

"Malcomm, the road wasn't meant for this and neither was the wagon. She's going to break up!" Billi yelled as the wagon jumped another jumble of rocks.

"He's right Malcomm. And who the hell put you in charge anyway, not Hawkens." Wrapped in balling children, a young, wide

eyed Coro spoke up to Malcomm from where he sat with a menacing tone.

"Yea! And why can't we slow down, we've been going like this for more than ten minutes. Don't you think it's gone by now!" Gerald's voice was hardly audible under the many children that were clinging to him. The narrow features of his face topped by a crop of wild red hair fought to be seen above the writhing bodies of the distraught children. His expression was that of anger, as it usually was, but directed at Malcomm not the children.

"Be silent! Both of you! You whelps know nothing of what goes on here. You contribute nothing by arguing with me. I-"

"Hold on!" Billi screamed. Suddenly the wagon hit another jumble of rocks, much larger than the others. The whole thing leapt into the air. Gerald and Coro tried desperately to keep the children from falling out of the wagon, Lyle helped as best he could. Malcomm nearly lost his balance and fell out, but Billi caught him at the last second, catching the bench with his other hand to see that they both didn't fall. The jump had taken Hawkens by complete surprise, he had been trying to listen to what was being said up front. When Billi yelled his warning he could do little more than watch. Olmar beside him grabbed his shoulder with a powerful hand and kept them from falling out of the wagon by holding onto the side railing.

The wagon came down with a loud crash, the back end collapsing and dragging in the rocks and dirt. Billi and Malcomm were thrown into the back on top of Gerald, Coro and the children who were able to keep themselves in the wagon. Lyle had been hit by the Barrel of ale as it was tumbling out the back and was knocked clear of the wagon. He lost his grip on his children when he was hit and fell apart from where they landed. Hawkens and Olmar hit the back board of the wagon and tumbled out when it broke underneath them. They both tossed and turned in the rock filled road for a dozen feet before coming to a stop.

Hawkens, all cut up from the fall, looked up from where he was. Not five feet to his right Olmar was doing the same. Up the road the wagon had stopped, maybe thirty or so feet ahead. The back axle was broken, whether it could be fixed or not he couldn't see. Malcomm, Billi, Gerald, Coro, and most of the children seemed to be alright lying in the back of the wagon. Having fallen out the back, the barrel of ale that Malcomm had insisted on bringing, lay intact close to where the others were. 'Funny that it should survive what we may not' Hawkens mused. A few feet off to the right of the road Lyle was getting up shakily, his head was bleeding and his left arm was twisted unnaturally. A haunted look dominated his face as he staggered over to where a small, still form lay. A few feet away from that another small form stirred slightly and moaned.

Hawkens forced himself to his feet, the pain from his wounds lancing at him with a maddening consistency.

"Hawkens." Olmar gripped his arm and tried to help him stand, but Hawkens just pushed him away. All he could see was Lyle, his head bent over the body of a little girl he clutched to him tightly. The girl's face bent back, staring peacefully at the night sky. Olmar stood there at his side watching him silently.

"I will check on the others." He said. Then went over to the wagon where Malcomm was trying to calm the kids down, while Gerald and Coro were looking under the wagon and suffering under Billi's yelling. Olmar joined them and was immediately attacked by more of Billi's raving, something about a debt and who was going to pay. But Hawkens wasn't listening. He staggered slowly over to where Lyle was now covering the face of the girl he had held with a blanket from his pack. Kneeling at his right was a little boy of maybe five, his son Kirim. Bruised, but otherwise alright. The girl's name had been Sersa. Both father and son were quiet as he approached.

"Lyle, I-" Hawkens started, but he could not finish. He had known this girl since

her birth, known Lyle even longer. The pain he felt now was worse than any that his wounds had given him. Lyle laid the girl to the ground and took the boy's hand in his. His face remained down, looking at the form of his daughter beneath the blanket as if for the last time. Kirim merely looked questionly at his father, he did not understand. Then Lyle looked up and stared with dead eyes right at Hawkens.

"I know what your going to say Hawkens, don't. There was nothing you or I or anyone could have done. It happened. Let it be." And without another word Lyle took his son over to the wagon and the rest of the group.

'Let it be' Lyle's words echoed through Hawken's head over and over again. Yes. Thoughts and deeds are to be spent on the living, not those who have passed on. He would bring the others to safety. He would!

"Sleep, child. Sleep." He said simply, then started over to the wagon. He saw that they had gotten all the children out of it and had placed the back up on a makeshift pile of rocks, Gerald and Coro were underneath the wagon inspecting the axle. Olmar and Billi were looking over the horses. And Malcomm had actually gotten the children to quiet down a little by the side of the wagon, but calls for their mothers and fathers still rose above their crying. Some of those calls would never be answered.

A loud screeching howl echoed from back where they had come, the sound lingering over them, paralyzing them. All eyes turned fearfully down the road to the east, trying to see past the darkness and to what lay beyond. But they didn't need to see to know what bore down on them at that very moment. The children clutched each other in terror. All the others merely stood where they were in shock and fear. All except Malcomm. He stood tall above the children, all expression gone from his face as he looked past the light of the wagon's torches into the darkness. "It's found us." he said, his face growing hard and his eyes tightening as if he was grappling with some

Another screech shot up from down the road, much closer this time. The frenzied men were not even slowed, but moved to work faster. Olmar stood up and apart from Hawkens and Billi as Gerald handed them the rope and they three began to tie the branches as braces to the broken axle.

"Coro! Malcomm! Get Lyle and the kids into the wagon, now!" Hawkens commanded from under the wagon. Then noticed Olmar untying his bow and quiver from his pack.

"Olmar, what are you doing? Get the horses ready! It's almost here!" He screamed as he finished his double knot and started out from under the wagon. Gerald and Billi had finished their knots as well and were checking to see if it would hold up.

"Billi can do that," he said simply, kneeling a few dozen feet off down the road "It's too close. Get on the wagon, quickly." He nocked an arrow, drew, and fired just as something huge lumbered out of the darkness not fifty feet from Olmar. The giant wolf-like creature paid the arrow no mind as it sunk into it's shoulder, but then he had come to expect as much. The thing looked larger somehow, waving it's massive maw wide to show many rowed teeth. A red halo of light from it's eyes made it seem like a demon of hell, which wasn't altogether unlikely.

"Vena save us! It's here!" Coro screamed, bringing Hawkens back to his senses. He quickly turned away from where Olmar was shooting arrow after arrow, each hitting it's mark but doing little that he saw, and ran over to where Gerald and Coro were trying desperately to get the children into the wagon.

"Hurry damn you! Faster, or we'll never make it!" Billi waited impatiently in the driver's seat, looking much more sober than usual and with good reason. Lyle lay on the floor of the wagon, unconscious, with Malcomm looking over him. Nearly all the children were in the wagon, only three remained. Hawkens quickly took a look back at

Olmar. The beast bore down on him with all it's speed. Huge, powerful limbs taking it faster than any animal he had ever seen. Giant claws ripping up the rocks as well as the dirt of the road with every bound. Body riddled with arrows, some in it's legs and head, and yet it still came! The thing was a nightmare on all counts. Olmar leapt to his feet, dropping his bow, and began running back to the wagon with the thing only several feet behind.

"Get in! Move!!" Hawkens yelled at Coro who had been lifting children into the wagon. Coro complied immediately taking one of the kids in with him. Hawkens quickly handed another child to Gerald then grabbed the last and heaved them both into the back space, instantly looking back for Olmar. He saw his old mentor running to them in the silhouette of the horrid beast just behind him, it's eyes glowing brightly in expectation. For an instant, student and teacher locked eyes. There was no fear in those eyes, Hawkens noted, only calm acceptance. And a firm command.

"Billi! Go!" It only took a moment's hesitation to make the decision. Even going now the thing might be too close to get away. Hawkens prayed he had not failed his friends once more.

The Wagon pulled free of the pile of rocks it had been set on and began to race away from the scene. Olmar ran over to the side of where the wagon had once been, out of Hawkens's sight. For the beast was no longer chasing him, having seen that it's prey was getting away, it was now bounding straight from the wagon! It was too close. The wagon hadn't been able to build any speed. The beast took one powerful leap and Hawkens watched it coming down, right into the back of the wagon.

Before it landed however, Malcomm's barrel of ale came hurtling out of nowhere and smashed directly into it's chest. Throwing it off to the side. Covered in the barrel's contents, the thing twisted around in the air to land by the side of the road on it's feet. As the wagon raced away Hawkens watched Olmar run up to it and

toss a lit torch into it's bulk. The resulting blaze was blinding. It screamed in rage, but still it stood consumed in yellow tongues of flames, seemingly unharmed! It's eyes darted from Olmar to the disappearing wagon, deciding which prey it would take for it's own. Olmar had gone back to where he had dropped his bow, his motion a blur as he tried to get it's attention with a hail of arrows. The beast merely shrugged, the shafts off and stared at the wagon, preparing to start after it. Olmar fired his last arrow then got out his axe running at the thing, screaming, doing anything to pull it's away from the wagon. The fire that had consumed it before was starting to dim, when suddenly it flared with new life. Burning a hot reddish color. Hawkens gasped in surprise as the thing screamed in pain. Seconds later it lurched over a foot or two as Olmar's axe buried itself in it's side. Lightning fast the creature oriented itself on Olmar standing several feet off to the side of the road and darted after him when he dodged into the trees, leaving a burning swath where it entered.

Hawkens slowly set himself down on the floor of the wagon, watching the trees burning out the back of wagon until they disappeared behind a curve in the road. He looked up to the sky and whispered a silent prayer for his friend. Gerald and Coro stared back at where the curve in the road hid the spot where they had just been. They looked at each other then collapsed on the floor of the wagon. Malcomm had huddled the children around him and had Lyle lying by his side, but he was oblivious to them as he stared back down the road.

"Brave bastard, that Olmar! Eh, Malcomm? You'd never catch ol'Billi doing something like that. Not that I couldn't...." Billi had slowed the horses down to keep the wagon from pulling itself apart again, but even so the jolting of rough ground was very noticeable.

"Damn these rocks! I hate Stony Vale! The closer we get the worse it becomes. Why

don't they ever clear the road?" Billi waited for an answer, then looked back at Malcomm to see him staring back where they had come. He turned back around.

"Too bad about that ale barrel, eh? I mean sure it was for a good cause, but to burn it up like that-" Billi paused for a moment.

"Hey. How the hell did that ale spark back up like that anyway?" He asked himself.

"I think your eyes are playing tricks on you again, Billi. It didn't flare, just changed color. I had some herbs mixed in with the ale that could've done that." Billi almost jumped when Malcomm answered him. He turned again to ask him what the hell he was talking about, but stopped when he found him quietly speaking to the children once more. Billi let out a curse under his breath and turned back to the front of the wagon once more. What the hell was Malcomm talking about. Hawkens hadn't let him bring any ale on the trip, because he was to drive the wagon. But he had tapped a little from Malcomm's barrel when no one was looking. Billi knew his liquor, and that had been straight ale. He was sure there had been no herbs in it. And by hell if he hadn't seen that fire flare up again. What was Malcomm trying to hide.

YOUR SHADOW, YOUR SOUL

by nicole silenzi

Only when you are strong enough,
Want to see it bad enough,
Will the sun shine down upon you
To show you your shadow,
Your soul,
Your true self
It is something you have to look
Within and around yourself to see.

Your shadow is pure.
It should be trusted
And followed.

If you give up on yourself,
You are giving up on your shadow
And all that it promises.

Do not let the world stop you.
Stop only briefly to look at your shadow-
Look deeply, follow where it leads.
Let it guide you into the world of innocence,
A world of triumph and joy.

Your shadow is your future.
It leads you to your hopes, goals and dreams.
Follow it until you are satisfied-
Follow it for the rest of your life.

Your soul is all that it should be:
Uninhibited,
Unprejudiced,
Unstoppable.

It is only when you want to see your soul
And have it lead you
That the sun will shine down upon your body
And show it to you.

CYCLES

by Patricia Smith-Pomales

I was a thought
but at the time
knew not
as I was of another's making.

I'm not sure if
as a thought
I was trapped,
or only confined.

But, at some point
I was released
through expression
and I was a whisper.

The whisper made sound
and the sound

was spoken
and I was a word.

The word was appealing
sweet
as a melody
and I was a song.

And the song was merry
so I became
laughter
and the laughter was joyful.

So festive was the
laughter
that soon
I was a dance.

And the dance became
touch, the touch
an embrace
and I was love.

The love conceived life
and I was life in
a womb
but at the time knew not,

as I
was the making
of others.

Wallpaper

Dancing wallpaper,
only preliminary entertainment
to the kissing of Casanova by
faceless hair.

The animals all run away,
only some reappear on polished floors
and others around pearled necks;
the rest hold up the flood gates
until the technopop smiles
flash behind a camera
shooting the wall papered room.

Mr. Cosmo doesn't know it,
but it is the animals
that are being
shot.

Joe Durham

DAD

I cry out at night in agony,
but the world has turned a cold shoulder to me.
I have lost all sense of feeling,
but my heart goes through emotions.
I feel nothing and then I feel everything.
I long for something wild and crazy,
but I don't know what I long for.
I want a sense of freedom.
I want to become one with myself.
I reach out for that father figure
who was so quickly rubbed out of my life.
I scream and sob for his return.
No body listens.
I beg and plead to his memory to let me be,
yet he still keeps coming back.
Asking the fatal question
Julie, why didn't you say you loved me?
He was the one and only of my time
who understood me or even tried.
How quickly his fire was extinguished.
Are you watching over me?
Do you feel shame?
Is it pride?
Or do you even care?
Is there any thoughts of me in your mind
or do you not exist any more.
Will I ever see you again?
If so will you tell me you love me?
Now I am ready to tell you I do.

By Julie Spam

Untitled

Today, nailed to the grief
of a life, which will

always come back
to haunt me.

Wish, not being a question
is only an escape
from what it
can not cover.

Future actions are
stirred by memories,
which remind me
every day.

Joe Durham

WHAT?!

The window closed in the night
the sun arose in a purple lift
hanging over the world we see
showing all unhappy glee

Why?

People in the high mountains and
low valleys couldn't find it

What?

Purple underwear hanging in the trees.

-lacy

A Man's a Man

white or black it matters not
your flesh is just a frame
there's hate and love and fear my friends
so no ones left to blame
people judge by shades of skin
that's such a God Damn shame
cause when you reverse the way we think
inside we're all the same

b/w

Star Trek: The Next Generation

"Hampster Dreams and Strenger Things..." Part II
A Parody by Bryan Walko

Original Star Trek concept by Gene Roddenberry

[SCENE 3]

[In outer space, emerging from the glare of the sun, there is a large tin of Spam traveling at Warp 9]

[The entire bridge crew is at their stations, sans Dianna]

Troi: [Over intercom] Captain, I am done with tube five sir. I am now starting tube six.

Picard: [To Troi] Very good...make it so.

Ensign: Captain, there is an unidentified Spam on the scanners.

Riker: [Puzzled, a concept not new to Riker] Unidentified Spam?

Picard: Ensign, if it is a Spam ship, how could it be unidentified?

Ensign: Captain?

Picard: A Spam ship is an identity. How can you have an unidentified identified object?

Riker: It looks like Spam sir.

Ensign: I meant that it was a weird looking intergalactic Spam tin. I just use

the word "unidentified" to describe all the ships I see.

Picard: With a mind like that Ensign, you'd be lucky to make it to the end of this page!

[The bridge rocks and sways with a hit from the Spam warship.]

Riker: Captain! The ship is rocking and swaying from a hit from the Spam warship!

Picard: Brilliant Number One! Next thing you'll be telling me that it is because they are firing on us! You shouldn't be on this ship! You should be on Jeopardy! [Changing his voice] Very good William Riker, you swept this category, "The fucking obvious"!

Riker: Why thank you sir!

[The ship shakes with another hit. A close-up of the bridge shuffleboard rack reveals that a stick has fallen over.]

Worf: I think we should return fire sir!

[A Spam warrior, i.e. a pale-faced guy with armor made entirely from old Spam tins, beams onto the bridge next to the Ensign.]

Spam: We are Spam. You will be heat-pasteurized. But first...

[The Spam warrior extends his arm. A box-shaped device pops out of the back of his hand. The top half of the box separates and elevates on a piston. The top half of the box swivels 180 degrees and two small barrels thrust out towards the Ensign. A small antennae flips out and scans the Ensign. A few seconds after, the barrels glow, as if they were charging. The device is about to fire when it sparks

and fizzles out. It does nothing to the Ensign, who is relieved.]

Ensign: Guess I beat the odds
Captain!

[The Spam soldier takes out a large machete and hacks the Ensign's head off.]

Ensign: AAAAUUUUUGHHHHH!

Riker: [Talking into space] Crusher to bridge immediately!

[The Spam warrior beams back to the large Spam vessel after killing the Ensign.]

Riker: [To Picard] I think he's dead Captain.

Picard: Thank you Number One.
[To Worf] Fire photon torpedoes!

Worf: Firing now Captain.

[From the bridge, there is the sound of the torpedoes launching. On the sixth shot, there is an audible "Aaaiieeee!"]

Worf: Whoops.

[Doctor Crusher enters from the turbolift and walks over to the decapitated Ensign]

Riker: [To Crusher] The Ensign's head fell off.

Data: Captain, the damage to the Spam vessel is concentrated in one area. We have scratched the paint in the upper left corner of the "S". Of the crew, there are no casualties, but one soldier has a slight limp.

Picard: Get us out of here now!
Warp nine!

Data: Aye Captain.

[The Enterprise swings around away from the Spam ship. At this point, a large electric charge is fired from the Spam vessel. The charge passes effortlessly through the Enterprise's shields. The electric charge surrounds the Enterprise and disappears. The Warp engines are about to kick in when there is a pathetic farting sound.]

Geordie: [Over intercom] Captain, the shear-plane joints of the power transfer conduits have blown! It is impossible to reconnect them...there is no power to the Warp nacelles.

Picard: [To Geordie] I have no idea what you're talking about.

Geordie: [Over intercom] To put it simply, the fuel lines have been cut.

Picard: [To Geordie] You couldn't make it any simpler could you?

Geordie: [Over intercom] Well, the food can't get to the Enterprise's mouth so it's big engines can't go "chuf chuf chuf" and we can't get away from the bad old bear.

Riker: [To Picard] Thank you sir. [To Geordie] So you're saying we can't move?

Geordie: [Over intercom] Not unless we can find an alternative source of power. We won't be able to use the matter/antimatter reaction chamber for power.

[SCENE 4]

[Inside the conference room everybody is sitting at the table.]

Geordie: So unless we can find a power source, we're stuck.

[The ship shakes with yet another hit from Spam warship.]

Crusher: Captain, how can we afford to be in conference when we are being attacked by the Spam?

Picard: Doctor Crusher, the conference room is a symbol of Starfleet. The room is designed for the democratic use on which the United Federation of Planets was founded!

[His words command awe and respect from those in the room.]

Picard: Anyway, this is the only replicator on the Enterprise capable of synthesizing good beernuts. [Pulls a rather enormous bowl of beernuts from under the table.] Who wants beernuts?

Riker: Thank you Captain. [Takes a small handful of nuts. A round from the Spam ship causes the room to violently shudder. Data takes one nut and studies it while Worf takes the entire bowl and stuffs his face into it.]

Picard: [To replicator] More beernuts! [It does so, and he takes the second large container.]

Crusher: Sir, I hardly think this is...

[A Spam warrior beams over to the Enterprise's conference room. Worf jumps up at the table and fires a phaser at the Spam. It does absolutely nothing, which is what Riker did, as he sat and ate beernuts. Picard gestured for everybody to back off which was unnecessary since they were all very busy, eating beernuts.]

Picard: [Talking quite loudly and slowly to the Spam] I..am.. Captain Jean-Luc Picard..of the starship.. En..ter..prise.

Riker: [To Picard] I know that Captain.

[Picard hits Riker on the head.]

Spam: Taste is irrelevant. You will be heat-pasteurized.

[The Spam takes a shot at the replicator at destroys it in a very nice and considerably expensive light show. He glides over to the Captain and relieves him of the bowl. Worf and Riker have already eaten their share. The Spam turns and walks away to its beam-up site.]

Picard: This...

[The Spam turns around and Picard shuts up instantaneously. The Spam stares into space, looking much like someone who was trying to guess the size of your shoes without looking. It stops and walks over to Data and takes the beernut that he was examining.]

Picard: This...

[The Spam turns again in Picard's direction. Again Picard shuts up.]

Riker: [Breaking the inquisitive silence] I think...

Picard: [Smacks Riker upside the head] Shhh!

[The Spam beams back to his ship with all the beernuts.]

Picard: This is an act of war! Since when have we allowed our nuts to be taken?!

Data: I believe your last time was in the bathroom, with Dianna, when...

Picard: [Completely embarrassed]
Enough! [To Geordie] Mr. La Forge, what are our options?

Geordie: What we need is an alternative power source.

[Everybody looks at Geordie when they realize that they are supposed to be thinking. Suddenly, everyone looks thoughtful, except Riker, who is so ridiculously overacting, he appears constipated.]

Riker: What if we took all the solar calculators...

Picard: Oh please.

Geordie: I think this is a job for...

[The entire table looks at Geordie.]

Riker: [Breaking the silence]
Super-puppy?
[Picard smacks Riker again.]

Geordie: Tippy the Wonder Hamster!

Picard: Did I miss something?
What are you?!? Blind?!

Data: No Captain, I believe he is correct. If Tippy could generate enough speed, the mechanism could generate power adequate to fuel the Warp nacelles.

Picard: Exactly what speed would it need to achieve?

Data: I calculate...[Pauses]
approximately Mach 2.

Picard: That's the dumbest thing I ever heard! You can't get a hamster to run Mach 2, I don't care if it is a god damn "Wonder Hamster!"

Crusher: No, he's right! With the right amount of narcotics, we could get it to break the sound-barrier...

Picard: Oh, this is wonderful! Before this I would only use the expression "Hamster on crack" to describe the intellect of my First Officer!

Riker: Why thank you sir.

Worf: Sir, permission to kill the hamster.

Picard: What? No! Why the hell would you ask such a stupid request?

Worf: I was just getting bored. And the beernuts gave me gas.

[SCENE 5]

[A majestic version of the overture is heard, reminiscent of a version performed by a hamster on crack. Geordie and Data are staring at the Warp engines. They are doing absolutely nothing.

There is a cage resting on the Warp consoles in the middle of the room. The cage has a multitude of black wires and cables hooked into it. There is a hamster in the cage, sitting next to the exercise wheel, cleaning itself.] Geordie: Now Data, Tippy has been given a large dose of narcotics... [A close-up of Tippy: He is wearing a little Starfleet Admiral's uniform. He is cleaning his face at five times the speed of a normal hamster. He is clearly wired.]

Geordie: ...just how long do you think he can perform at optimum levels?

25 years after Speed Racer...

Data: My research on chemically enhanced badgers would suggest a timespan of about ninety minutes.

[Geordie moves to a wall console, opposite the center table.]

Geordie: OK Data, start her up!

[There is a long silence. Data is looking intently at Tippy. Tippy is licking himself, very fast.]

Geordie: Data? Start the hamster!

[Geordie thinks about his last statement. He realizes that it is the second dumbest statement he ever said. Of course, the dumbest thing he had ever said was "Hmmm... I see..." He stops to collect his wits.]

Geordie: Data...

Data: [Interrupting] I am attempting to make sense of your last sentence. [Pauses] Geordie, I consider that to be the second dumbest thing you have ever said.

Geordie: I think I have it Data!

Data: The pronoun "it" can refer to over 287 trillion different nouns. Since 75 percent of these are from obscure alien dialects and another 1 trillion are words used by Commander Riker to describe urination, the chances of me guessing the correct noun would be 70 trillion to 1. Since guessing all the possibilities will take well after the end of the universe, I will start now. Do you have an aardvark?

Geordie: No, I...

Data: Do you have a french poodle?

Geordie: Data...

Data: Do you have a volcano?

Geordie: DATA!

Data: Do you have a dung beetle?

Geordie: Yes!

Data: Why would you wish to tell me that you think you have a dung beetle?

Geordie: Data, I think I have an answer!

Data: A correction Geordie, you said that you had a dung beetle.

Geordie: [Dejected] Forget it.

Data: Erasing the pronoun "it" from my memory. Speech will be inordinately difficult without that pronoun. [Geordie ignores Data and his vocabulary augmentation. He moves to the wall and removes a phaser. He then strolls to the cage as inconspicuously as possible.]

Geordie: [At a blinding speed, he points the phaser at the cage.] RUN YOU STINKING HAMSTER!!!

[Quite surprisingly, the hamster responds to the threat. It waddles over to the exercise wheel and climbs onto it.]

Geordie: MOVE, TIPPY!

[Geordie watches as Admiral Tippy lurches at an amazing speed, spinning the wheel. Geordie moves closer in an attempt to follow the wonder rodent's feet, which are merely a blur. Data approaches behind him looks closely at the cage.]

Data: The hamster has achieved Mach 3.

Geordie: [Stands up straight and looks to his left] Damn...

[The Warp engine is not only glowing in its familiar blue, the light is moving incredibly fast.]

Geordie: [Taps his insignia] Captain, we have more than enough power for Warp speed. In fact, we probably have enough to power Los Angeles for a year. We might even have enough power to give the New York Mets a feared lineup.

Picard: [Over intercom] Just one miracle will be sufficient.

Geordie: [To Picard] Did you notice that the Spam has not fired on us for almost four pages?

Picard: [Over intercom] Yes, that is funny.

Data: [Clearly trying to laugh] He. He. Ha ha.

Riker: [Over intercom] Data, he didn't mean "funny, ha ha," the Captain meant "funny, petunia."

Picard: [Smacks Riker so hard, it is heard over the intercom.] Peculiar! Peculiar, you idiot! [Clears throat.] Warp Nine, get us out of here!

[Little did the crew know about why the Spam had not fired. When the Captain had created the beernuts in the replicator, the Spam sensors had picked it up as being very similar to the way that they create crew members. Convinced that the beernuts were alive, they kidnapped them and

attempted to interrogate them. The Spam had wanted to learn the usual things, crew size, number of battleships in the Federation fleet, Dianna's chest measurements, and, of course, the secrets of the mysterious Romulan prototype lawnmower. The beernuts actually said very little aside from their name, rank, and serial number. Infuriated, the Spam threatened to boil them in oil, and did so. Later, however, they discovered they taste much better with salt.]

[SCENE 6]

[On the Spam ship, one Spam is eating beernuts. This scene deals mostly with shots of Spam eating beernuts and, consequentially, has very little to do with the story. Suffice to say, they look very devious eating the beernuts, with salt or oil. Actually, they look about as devious as a totally expressionless person can look.]

TO BE CONTINUED

RAT AND SINISTER by Mark Francisco

A burned-out husk was the best way to describe the factory. Girders spanned the ceiling like the spine of some long dead beast and the walls and roof encased the structure in a hardened chitinous exoskeleton. It was a factory that once teemed with activity and importance. Now, it just laid dead and forgotten to all, save the bums who occasionally slept there. The machinery was torn away as was all that could be salvaged and sold by a business seeking to suck all the profits possible from a doomed enterprise. Busy workmen and deafening machines gave way to tattered walls

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LUM

Ranma 1/2



and dusty floors and silence. This night in the factory was much like any other, save for the dying wretch propped up along one wall. The man was old and had seen better days. Maybe he was even one of those who worked in this very factory so many years ago. Now, he was cursed to wander the streets alone and defenseless. The wretch coughed again and more blood dribbled from his mouth. There was quite a pool of the stuff, soaking his shirt front and wetting the cold concrete floor.

Against his will the man let out another cough and still more blood spat forth. With every breath someone seemed to drive a steel spike through his lungs. With each flash of pain came a bright white flash in his eyes and a dull throbbing in his ears. Slowly, the man's pain lessened until he felt nothing. He was dead. No one was around to gaze upon the poor man's death. A tiny pair of red eyes were the only exception. Rat looked down upon the wretch with a great sadness in his heart. His tiny claws quickly brought him scampering across the girder beam and down the wall to crouch beside the corpse. "This is the fifteenth and still I have done nothing," thought Rat as he pondered the lifeless form before him. Rat knew exactly what has caused the man's death but he lifted his pointed gray snout to the air to confirm his suspicions anyway. Instantly, his sensitive nose grasped the scent he sought. It was a scent that he had never known until two weeks ago. The smell was foul and corrupt, full of sorrow and pain. A scent that was immersed in misery until it was no longer separate from its source. It was the smell of Sinister. Rat didn't know what Sinister was or where it had come from. He only knew that it had moved into his home and preyed upon the wanderers like the one that now lay dead before him. Sinister could not be seen, could not be heard, and his touch caused agony and death.

Rat arched his back and stuck his nose higher into the air. Sinister's scent-trail led into a small storeroom at the back of the factory. The storeroom was not remarkable in all aspects,

save that it was the lair of Sinister. Ever since Sinister appeared in the factory Rat and his fellows could never work up enough courage to enter the storeroom. Sinister's unholy stench was too effective in displaying the spirit's evilness. On feet designed for stealth and with a body designed for creeping, Rat slowly worked his way across the debris ridden floor. Under planks and over rubble Rat crept until he reached the open doorway. It took all the bravery Rat could muster to slip a bodylength into the oppressive room. He smelled it there, in the corner. Sinister stank with grim satisfaction and a cruel glee. The corpse's withered essence seemed superimposed upon the scent of the evil one. An essence that grew less with each passing moment. Then, without fanfare or ceremony, it was snuffed out and Sinister gave a contented groan. "Fifteen souls destroyed," Rat thought to himself, "I have done nothing." The rats ran in fear from Sinister and the men did to. Everyone knew where it was and what it was doing, but they did nothing about it. They took no action against Sinister. He was just too powerful and their fear stopped them all cold. "But what can I do? I'm just a rat. We are not the warriors of the animal world. We are the scavengers, the rodents, the undesirables. I can do nothing," Rat murmured.

Rat looked again to where Sinister was and knew it would only be a short time until he siphoned all the life, rat and human, from the area. "I have to try," said Rat as he scurried back into the darkness.

The following night a steady rain washed quietly over the shell of the factory and collected in pools below the open holes. The corpse was still nestled up against a grimy wall as it had remain unnoticed over the last day. Sinister was out plaguing the bums around the neighborhood. He had been gone for some time and was bound to return soon. Rat and his horde of tiny friends were ready. It took them well quite a while to push a rotted old barrel across the feeble second-story loft of the factory. Now, they waited huddled around it

with their noses stuck in the air and their hearts pounding with fear and determination. Their prey would not escape. Suddenly, that unholy stench overcame Rat's nostrils and he knew that Sinister had returned with a freshly captured essence. The thing made its way slowly throughout the factory and then came to rest in its corner lair in the storeroom. Writhing in satisfaction and with essence dripping down its chin like the poor wretch's blood, Sinister was oblivious to the danger hovering above him like dark thunder clouds. All across the ceiling rats swarmed, pushed on by their leader. With a great ferocity they attacked the ceiling. Their razor sharp teeth ripped chunks from the decaying wooden floors and the rat's claws scratched furiously. The floor creaked and gave way spilling the rats and the barrel into the chamber below. The barrel plummeted downward and neatly encircled Sinister's resting body. Rat felt himself fall into the pit of darkness below him and the unholy stench of Sinister seemed to catch him. At this distance the odor of suffering and corruption almost overpowered him but it only served to increase his fury. Rat saw the open barrel hit the floor below him and a cry rang throughout the factory. A cry that echoed a hiss and a growl and a human scream all in an instant. His fall was stopped short from the ground as he landed on something invisible to his own small eyes. Without waiting, even an instant, to recover from his fall Rat was clawing his way upward on Sinister's body. Sinister seemed to have a humanoid body, Rat deduced, and that he had landed on the thing's upper arm. His claws gripped something other than flesh, though. It seemed to be cloth. An impossible garment made from ash and threads of bone. A cloth imbued with despair and the remnants of long-forgotten meals. Squirring beneath the swarm of rats, Sinister rocked back and forth, trying to maneuver in the claustrophobic confines of the barrel. Rat scrambled up onto Sinister's shoulder and lunged at its neck. He was having trouble holding onto something he

couldn't see but he managed somehow. His snout whiskers brushed against Sinister's neck and he bit deep with his teeth. The putrid odor assaulted him at an intensity over a thousand times of that he had smelled before. Rat tasted dry flesh and forced himself forward. The swarm of rats came at Sinister again and again. Eyes, wrists, ankles, and other bodyparts were torn and ripped by the rats' fury. Sinister screamed and cried and howled but could not maneuver out of the rats' trap. The barrel stood strong and easily bound Sinister to his destruction. Rats were crushed to death and rats were drained of their souls, but they still came. Rat burrowed deeper into Sinister's neck and tasted blood. Blood that seemed like acid and filled Rat's snout with fire. Still, he pressed on. Soon, the pain and stench became to great and darkness rushed over him. The last thing he heard that night was Sinister's death cry.

