

# The Works



honorable mention in student visual art contest (above):  
Carlow, Ireland  
by William Brown

Fiction

Poetry

Visual Arts

THE ANNE HORTON WRITING AWARD

**2011 Film Review Contest**

# ***The Works***

## **Editorial Staff . . . .**

Sara Beets  
Elizabeth Conderman  
Cody Froeter  
Tessa Ginn  
Tracy Hand  
Steven Hoyle  
James Hyde  
Jamie Lybarger  
Lauren Walter  
David Waters

## **Faculty Advisor . . . .**

Tom Irish

\* \* \* \* \*

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and English Department***

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# Poetry

## 2010-2011 student poetry contest winner:

### Human Cannibalization: A Study

I. Her knees left dimples in the soft earth by the body  
of a young boy who was her first child and only son.  
Grasping the bamboo filled with leafy fern and his spirit,  
extracted from his skull, her hands were dark with blood  
as they steamed the once hollow canes over a roaring fire,  
the fresh frigate bird motif on her face shining in the light.

She deliberately, lovingly scattered the limbs of her son  
before anxiously stealing the first taste of his hot blood  
from the woody stem that felt substantial yet light  
after she drew it to her weathered lips from the burning fire.  
The corners of her mouth were tugged into a smile as his spirit  
was returned to its origin—his mother's body.

II. Across the ocean men stood rigid and prayed for her heathen spirit  
so that she and her tribe might miraculously see the light  
and be rescued by the Church, an enlightened body.  
Worshippers' tongues curled fervently around words of the Son  
printed in crisp books telling how He sacrificed His blood  
to save their souls from eternal Hell fire.

From within their pools of wax, candles radiated dim light  
while the priest, zealous and filled with fire,  
offered Sacrament to any eligible to call himself the Lord's son.  
Restless stirring betrayed each man's eager spirit  
yearning to consume Christ's body  
as the priest recited, "This is my body, this is my blood."

III. Decades passed with little change to the church besides new blood.  
Today they pray for a deceased member, though they lack his body,  
for he had requested crematory fire—  
romanced by an exit in warmth and light.  
The first pew features the dead man's son,  
who scowls during Mass and reeks of spirits.

Now the son lies still as needles enter rapid-fire  
into his skin, the only way he knows to lift his spirit.  
Gloved hands deftly wipe away the rising blood  
to reveal bright, soaring wings drawn on his body.  
Milky bone pebbles from his father's ashes glint beneath the light,  
strewn among ink of the fluid script "Father and Son."

IV. As long as we have had need to light a fire,  
there has been a son carrying a lost companion's blood  
inside his body so he can somehow hold that spirit.

—Lauren Walter

## 2010-2011 student poetry contest honorable mention:

### At the End of the Wind

A breeze will carry with it,  
the scent of a coming storm or  
the beginning of a blustery day.

Mine shakes pine cones to the ground,  
swooping past lily patches  
and up the leaning orchards  
where sons climb after red gems for father.  
It squirms through screen shields above the sink  
and wrestles with the steam of  
mother's crackling pan.

Mine slowly throngs the trees  
as they give away their painted leaves  
and wait in stark ranks for it to come  
back and coat their grasping limbs.

It kicks up the dust of  
what the tractors leave behind  
like yarn and a kitten  
romping the countryside.

Mine keeps a hat on your head  
as the naked tone of human voice  
sings to silent shifting sidewalk scenes.  
The carols and streetlights carry the night  
while dainty flakes fall to their  
white curtain on a hallowed eve.

Mine coughs out the last breath of winter's chill  
to test the young strength of budding  
green beads dotting the forest wall.  
It trolls up and down the dipping hills  
to the two who watch puffy ships  
sail across the inverted sea.

Mine rises to sever the changing shapes  
while an onlooker looks back  
at the other face  
where golden rakes  
of straying hair  
flutter across a tickled smile.

When it falls down to brush  
red in her cheeks,  
mine dissipates.  
Then she matches my contented stare,  
and I keep her there,

in the trusted rows of  
lifeless living fantasy,  
making her more kind  
and necessary than she  
-or any of it-  
could ever be.

—Phil Arellano

## Doesn't Feel Right

It doesn't feel right not to dance  
When my feet can swiftly carry me  
It doesn't feel right not to smile  
When the sun is beating its warm rays upon my cheeks  
It doesn't feel right not to sing  
In the streets that cannot harm me  
It doesn't feel right not to rejoice  
While I live this party  
But even though, I am standing still  
Like a boulder, a concrete emotion plastered on my face  
No hymn to fill my lungs and the clean air  
Not a praise has left my soft lips  
I'm too proud to join the dance  
Instead my eyes water and I tremble in the sunlight  
-Just doesn't feel right

It doesn't feel right that I dance  
When my feet are broken and crippled  
It doesn't feel right that I smile  
When the rainclouds pour heavy drops upon my cheeks  
It doesn't feel right that I sing  
When lifting a voice in this land is suicide  
It doesn't feel right that I rejoice  
When my body is starving for bread and mercy  
But even though, I shall dance in this heavy night  
Under the rolling thunder  
In the perverted streets  
With my crooked feet  
Because the hourglass sands won't stop slipping through my fingers  
To waste even a grain of it with tears- what a pity!  
The rich, fat man who thinks he is not  
Shall be brought to agony and torture  
When he becomes hypnotized by my quick steps  
For he claims that the dance doesn't feel right  
To his handsome feet  
His sharp eyes blink when my mute voice sings  
And my bruised lips smile  
And my paralyzed feet dance  
While all his sand quickly slips away  
Before he even uses a grain of it to realize  
That his hands can't grab it back  
-Just doesn't feel right

—Sara Beets



## Goodnight

You used to promise me the world  
With sideways stars in your eyes  
But now you take a few steps back  
Walking outside into the wet night  
As if the rain could wash away this emptiness  
As I turn around to watch you go  
I have memorized the back of your head  
The way your hair falls just so  
Barely brushing your neck,  
Moving just slightly with each step you take  
Your gait is measured  
As though with each breath or heartbeat  
Your foot hits the ground  
I wonder where you go  
When your taillights disappear into the darkness  
Fading faster than those sideways stars  
And promises of a happy life  
You forgot to kiss me goodnight.

—Hayleigh Covella

## Two Caves

Looking up I gaze  
In two symmetric caves  
Hovering just above me  
Pale green rocks covered in slime  
Many membrane thickened with grime  
Hovering just above me  
A sharp little snuffle  
Followed by low whistle  
Hovering just above me  
All of a sudden a blast hits my face  
Wet and dripping I look at the place  
Then I discover caves are not these  
Only a tall man who happened to sneeze

—Corey Coomes

## Doesn't Feel Right

That dreaded feeling.  
That little wad of fabric where the sun don't shine,  
stuck, like gum under a desk.  
There's no way you can just ignore it;  
there's no way to get it out because  
all eyes are on you.

Maybe, you can just subtly coax it out.  
A little wiggle to the left,  
a shimmy to the right,  
a trip to the pencil sharpener,  
but stuck in that sunless crevice it stays and  
all eyes are on you.

Your concentration is broken,  
that retched sensation the only thing you can notice.  
No simple way to dig the damn thing out.  
No polite way to regain comfort.  
All chances of focus, ruined. And still  
all eyes are on you.

You are on the verge of madness.  
Such a horridly small swatch of fabric!  
Finally, you take the plunge.  
You reach down and liberation is attained  
The only dilemma?  
All eyes are still on you.

—Tessa Ginn

## Speed Kills

I turn off the wipers  
They smear off the blood  
Organs and flesh fall from my hood  
Driving so fast  
I never came to see  
Desperate man dive in front of me  
Fragile body and mass of flesh  
Mangled, cold  
Exit through death  
No match for sleek machine  
No chance at such a speed  
Done by choice  
No second guess  
Still, quite sorry I drove so fast

—Corey Coomes

Something about bravery

“I almost did a very brave thing just now,” I say,  
foregoing greetings to spit out the words  
so they can’t be taken back and buried  
where he will never find them.

“Oh yeah?” he asks, amused, “what’s that?”

“I almost called you at one in the morning to tell you I’m wide awake  
and have been for an hour, remembering the night  
when we allowed the dilation of my pupils to do the talking.  
But if I am a deer, prick-eared yet doe-eyed  
with wobbling legs clumsy and new,  
does that make you a wolf?  
You must have stumbled across me some lucky day,  
for I was licked clean by the world.  
So do you circle patiently in dark forests,  
lurking and waiting until you can sink into my flesh  
and feel my blood run beneath you  
like a pure fresh forest stream?  
These are the thoughts I have sitting straight up in bed  
in the times when I try to be brave.  
And despite the two decades and many miles between us  
I know silence can impose equal distance,  
yet I only ever have this talk alone.”

So sighing I slip back under heavy blankets  
and in the moments before I find the peace of sleep  
I ask what he thinks and he says,  
“You almost did a very brave thing just now.”

—Lauren Walter

## In My Place

What is it you want? Don't you see that I tire  
Of the way we play this inconsequential game?  
If I could let sleeping dogs lie  
We would certainly be in a better place.  
In this castle made of glass  
I feel I'm unable to wear my crown.

Red and black journey far to find their crown.  
Fill the void, toast the glass;  
The pieces lined up, you gingerly place  
It on the square and let it lie.  
Its loyalty astounding, it never tires...  
My uncertainty becomes fair game.

I've never known the name of the game,  
Just mindlessly put another mile on the tires,  
Staring intently into the old looking glass  
At my shattered crown  
And searching for a better, more comfortable place  
To sort out the lie.

One the surface, it burns like lye  
Scorching the colored crown,  
The burned rubber of a worn tire  
Skidding down a road covered in broken glass.  
It ceases to be a game;  
I need to get out of this place.

But isn't it inescapable, this place  
That has manifested from an inconsequential lie?  
Forever revolving, a twisted sport, this game  
Draining me of myself until I stoop and tire.  
My defeat is your crown  
My soul nothing but incandescent, fragile glass.

And yet I still drink from this glass  
Of poison that you took the time to place  
In the stead of my stolen crown.  
Anymore, there's no strategy in the game;  
Now I am too weak to lie.  
Now, I am too tired.

From my place here beside the blown-out tires  
I'll scornfully raise my glass to the game,  
To you, having stolen my crown with your lies.

—Jamie Lybarger

## Oh, Sweetie, Oh Please

Isn't it cute  
How I'm so naive?  
I can swallow your lines  
If I grit my teeth  
I'm your little ego boost  
When she makes you feel unworthy  
And I'm just pathetic enough  
To thrive on the attention  
So go ahead, call me pretty  
But let me tell you,  
You're not a big enough dick  
For this game.  
Yes, tease me with your calculus comments,  
But I guarantee it would hurt you  
If you saw what you're doing to me  
Oh, you're too chivalrous for this  
But tell me,  
Am I "uber sweet" enough for you  
In my black and pink panties?  
I can feel the guilt in the back of your throat  
And you called *me* a tease?  
Oh, sweetie, oh, please.

—Hayleigh Covella



Mortal

This is fascination  
  Infatuation  
  Saturation  
From my mind into my pores  
  Drenched in sweat  
  Mopped with tears  
  Cleansed in rain  
  Feel the pain  
I'm built of indestructible metals  
  Of iron, steel and bronze  
  Built a wall then broke it down  
Fought off villains and evil clowns  
  Dew  
  Scent  
  Spring  
Razor edge of Saturn's rings  
  Cut me in  
  Cut me deep  
The wounds won't ever seep  
  Stop the gears  
  And turn the wheel  
This is what it means to feel

—Sara Beets

Waning prophet with tears in your eye,  
fleeing down chasms of misty jive,  
rolling relief under yellow skies,  
searching places to frolic and ride,  
preening in puff as life goes awry,  
tainting your blood to worship the high.  
Born this morn . . . perhaps to die.

Sleeping prophet with dreams to imbibe,  
dying in embers of life contrived,  
wrenching in anger twisted inside,  
drowning in fears no pain can describe,  
starving in solace, no friend nearby,  
wanting to live yet knowing not why.  
Born this morn . . . perhaps to die.

Dreading prophet with nowhere to hide,  
with no one left to help or to bribe.  
Sands become rare as time flurries by,  
demanding a choice, a path to ally.  
To be, or default – to live or die,  
the final act, your choice to apply.  
Born this morn . . . perhaps to die.

Humbled prophet with tears in your eye!  
Yield! Be free to discover the lie.  
Rekindle the Light once lost to pride.  
Dance with the Spirit and feel alive.  
Fall to the summit and shed on High,  
hot tears of Love held captive inside.  
Born this morn . . . perhaps to cry.

## Unimpressed

He smiles at my pristine white dress  
I think of you when I'm at my best  
He's so pretty, but I'm not impressed  
It's your fault I'm such a mess  
...Could this affect you any less?

—Hayleigh Covella

## Planet Mars-Population: Failure

Back when peace was fought for and love was free  
When JFK still walked and breathed-  
NASA got together one day and said:  
“Our technology has become so far ahead!”  
You see, for they were smarter then we all knew  
And with their knowledge, a new adventure grew  
For the moon was now just too yesterday  
-Now that they know it’s just rocky and gray  
“So, off to the red planet!” is what they had chosen  
Because it wasn’t too hot, boring or frozen  
All supplies and rockets had to be made new  
-But who would they send as the lucky crew?  
“I have an idea!” piped up a scientist.  
“We will send some of this world’s finest!”  
The other scientists stared at him, confused,  
But beckoned him to continue telling his news  
“You see,” he said. “This world is in shambles”  
Because we have those who lie, cheat, and gamble”  
“Gangs are on the streets and drugs are, too  
Moral people and values have shrunk to a few”  
“If we send the earth’s most honorable and brightest  
Mars will be a planet full of prosperity and kindness!”  
The other scientists considered and agreed  
For it was a genius idea, indeed!  
-A planet without wars, or kids having babies  
or poverty, laziness, or abused ladies  
A place where everyone is happy and free  
Like how the earth was always meant to be  
A perfect plan- With no time to waste!  
They gathered up Noble Prize winners with haste  
The best astronauts they sent off as well  
So they could build houses to live in and sell  
With thousands of oxygen tanks and dried meat,  
And special suits to withstand immense cold and heat-  
The crew looked out their shuttle for one last goodbye  
While friends and family waved back and cried  
Little each day they saw the shrinking of Earth  
And soared through the stars until they landed on turf  
A first step was taken, a US flag put up high  
The new residents began building until the sun left the sky  
Years of hard work and toil soon went by  
Several trips had to be taken back to get more supplies  
But before you knew it, a town was built at last  
The buildings looked so luxurious, retro and vast

The townspeople got settled in and enjoyed  
This new life they happened to get chosen to employ  
Happy years went by, with never an offense  
There was no need of policemen or system of defense  
For all were good souls who worked hard each day  
And each earned every penny of all of their pay  
No one would even dare to hurt even a fly  
Or even shoplift, argue, or lie  
All was well on Mars, until that one day in June  
When all the astronauts said that they had to leave soon  
For supplies were getting short, and water was lacking  
So they planed another trip back to earth and got packing  
None of them stayed behind to govern the land  
It seemed to them that all would be in good hands  
But food was growing short, and tensions were rising  
And some of the elderly were slowly dying  
No healthcare to be found, and money seemed useless  
When it came to survival, the citizens were clueless  
Some started to argue, and others physically fight  
They were too fed up to determine what was wrong and right  
They stole water from each other till all of it was gone-  
They rather spill it on the dirt instead of getting along  
A few months passed by and the astronauts returned  
Only to find the city in shambles and burned  
All of the townspeople, they could not find  
After searching with no luck, they left Mars behind  
A lesson from this, we can all learn today  
So we might not also find out the hard way  
Because a good person, who can really judge?  
When circumstances turn their bodies into sludge?  
So now you know when you look up at the planets and stars  
That this is the reason there is no life on Mars

—Sara Beets

# Seventh Sin:

A collection of poetry

by Sara Beets, Tessa Ginn, and Lauren Walter

## Your Favorite Poison

My pastries are so sweet  
With frosting and chocolate filling  
You know you want to eat me  
My sugary taste and cream  
Will bring joy to your tummy  
(Gluttony)

My pages are so handsome  
Printed with pretty faces and dresses with laces  
You know you want to be like me  
My colorful photographs will remind you  
What you cannot be  
(Envy)

My shelves are so mesmerizing  
Stacked with pearls and velvet trimmings  
You know you want to buy all of me  
My price tags won't hinder your chance  
To take a glance, then take me home  
(Greed)

My eyes are so tempting  
As blue as the Grecian waters  
You know you want to be with me  
Your spouse won't ever know if you dress  
To impress and romance me  
(Lust)

My pillows are so comfy  
And aren't your eyes so heavy  
You know you want to sleep on me  
A little sleep, a little slumber  
And your skin will glow and your smile shine  
(Sloth)

My fire is so burning hot  
It's flames flicker and jump madly around  
You know you want to fuel me  
Just a little anger is all it takes  
For this fiery monster to explode  
(Wrath)

My poison is so betraying  
It calls your name and you can't refrain  
You know you want to intake me  
So drink me in, drink me deep  
Because nobody can escape vanity

-Because I come from not the outside  
I live, like a parasite, inside you  
I eat up your insides  
Till your skin falls apart  
If I were you, I wouldn't even start  
(Vanity)

by Sarah Beets

### The Unicorn

Yesterday I saw a unicorn just sitting at the zoo  
My eyes grew big and bright and round  
So I scooted on down and said howdy-do  
Us both just sitting on bare ground

Now he was big I mean real big  
With a belly droop almost petting the grass  
Swinging in a sleepy little jig  
And touching whatever he pass

Sure his white coat was bumpy and gray  
His broad snout grew a thick horn  
And his flowing tail was a slice of clay  
But he was my plain ol' unicorn

Momma isn't he great I asked  
That fat wrinkled thing? No way she said  
His warty old skin ought to be masked  
And if he tried in our world I think he'd be dead

But see those sleepy happy eyes in his head?  
Momma only crinkled up her nose  
And after a minute of staring said  
I don't know why you like these dumb rhinos

by Lauren Walter

### Imagine Me

This man who once sang for free  
Overburdened by fame  
And heroine now tarnishes my name  
Who could have seen  
That all of my dreams  
Could have ended here-  
How is it so?  
Certainly not I to be so low  
Imagine Me

### Imagine Me

This kid with skinned-up knees  
Will someday grow up  
To be begging with a cup  
Who could have guessed  
That I would become such a mess  
From dropping out of school-  
How can it be true?  
Certainly not me, but rather you  
Imagine Me

### Imagine You

With your life as good as new  
Because you escaped all the traps  
Like you had your own road map  
Who would have picked  
That your patience was thick  
And you watch your every step-  
How is it possible  
That you avoided all debts and hospitals  
Imagine You



Imagine You  
Looking down upon us foolish few  
Because our sins won't let us be free  
You can keep your pride  
While we slowly rot inside  
It's the price we must pay  
For what we did yesterday  
But humbleness comes to those as well  
That stumble but have not fell  
Imagine You

by Sara Beets

### Fleeting Efforts in Perfection

The hair, the clothes, the body:  
All the keys to his perpetual admiration.  
The mirror told her what she so longed to hear,  
Yet his gaze never wavered as she passed.

That mirror, mirror on the wall  
Reflected everything he wanted.  
Built into his dream, buying into his desires.  
Her flawless façade had made her his ideal,  
Yet alone she stayed.

Lost is the self respect she so prided herself on,  
Replaced by only a mission for his idea of excellence.  
That sense of unique just a distant thought, with her new being  
A reflection, a cookie cutter of a girl.  
She had tried and changed; she had completely transformed;  
She had undergone a seeming metamorphosis,  
But he still just passed her by.

All her efforts, all the work had rendered pointless.  
She was exactly what he wanted, except herself.  
Now worthless, a shell of a former girl passed him in the hall.

by Tessa Ginn

## Small fish in a big tank

The tank is haunted  
Every minute of every hour of every day  
And night by artificial light, bright  
Dimmed to the hazy tan of sand—  
Minus any sand —by a filter of floating waste.  
This fish is that fish is a fish to whichever hand  
Drops flakes of rust, mustard, and green  
Like dried autumn leaves in the tank.

Each races with eyes and mouth wide  
In full frenzy to find a share  
Of these colored chips in churning waters.  
Once spent, hungry bodies glint silver sharp  
As they cut toward a lonely fish.  
Tank corners have no white towels  
And the fish is tugged side to side,  
Leaving behind wispy trails of red.

Sometimes on a slow night  
When the only sound is a soft buzz  
From the unrelenting lights,  
The thick glass, not so thick, reflects  
Haughty employee eyes watching lives  
Of small fish in a big tank,  
Not seeing how this hand is that hand is a hand,  
Which may end up curled in a fist.

by Lauren Walter

## The Knights of Aisle Four

The group of knights, valiant and brave  
Approached their swords of pool noodles and steeds of shopping carts.  
In this early hour, their battle cries gave  
Way, the dual between men for the fair maidens' hearts.

Their stadium, aisle four.  
The adrenaline began to flow.  
There would be no blood to pour,  
But dignity on he line would take the brunt of the blow.

Their vanity allowing no thoughts of loss,  
Each man saw his enemy as merely a conquest.  
No apparent loser to come across,  
No ideas to outcome of these contests.

Pool floaties at the ready, the battle began.  
Knight against knight, winner takes all.  
Plus loser buys pizza for all the dotting fans.  
Both poor young scholars could afford to fall.

Both sped together, the moment of glory at hand.  
Knights braced for impact, all the maidens did gasp.  
The moment of truth, who is the strongest in the land?  
And who would win food and beautiful hands to clasp?  
That moment of truth, though, never would be.  
For the king manager emerged from the dark.  
His look of sheer fury inspired all knights to flee,  
But the king stopped them dead with a deafening bark.

So maidens and knights alike saw no winner that night.  
All were banished from the kingdom of Wal.  
As they marched away, in the first beams of morning light,  
They swore the thrill made it worth the fall.

by Tessa Ginn

### The Lonesome Valentine

My name is Ben  
I am only ten  
(Eleven though next May)  
In love with a girl  
With soft, blonde curls  
And her name is Susan K.

Susan K. is very pretty  
Popular, funny and quite witty  
(Much cuter than Susan G.)  
I sit behind her in music class  
When she's around, I talk too fast  
And feel the urge to pee

She has a tiny waist  
An angelic face  
(And the nicest clothes)  
She has the prettiest smile  
-For her, I'd walk ten miles  
And I stare at how her hair flows

But she'll be mine today  
For it is Valentine's Day  
(And I made her card by hand)  
With lace and glitter  
Borrowed from my sitter  
Asking if I'd be her man

My heart is thumping  
It might burst from pumping  
(Can you die from that?)  
As she pulls out my card  
I watch eagerly from afar  
Until she begins to laugh

From her distaste  
She throws the card in my face  
(After ripping it in two)  
And then she shouts,  
"Why would I ever go out  
With a geeky kid like you?"

With the valentine in hand  
To the bathroom I ran  
(So she couldn't see me cry)  
My eyes are now opened  
And my young heart, broken  
And my dreams of her will die

Who then next do I see  
But four eyed Susan G.  
(She must have waited by the door)  
As her meek voice stutters  
A condolence, she mutters  
As she nervously stares at the floor

She said, with her nose runny  
"I think you're cute and funny"  
("Pfft!" I thought, "you're only nine!")  
"This Valentine's Day I ask of you  
And I hope that it is true-  
That today you would be mine."

At her, I stared  
Noticing her greasy hair  
(Does she ever take a bath?)  
My answer came not in "Yay!"  
Or even in a blank "Ok"  
And I couldn't hold in my laugh

"I'd rather be dead!"  
Was instead I said  
(Sorry, but wrong Sue!)  
"You're too nerdy- and you stink!  
What would make you think  
That I'd go out with a geek like you?"

by Sara Beets

Ego

A fountain of over confidence,  
Oozing and ready to share your perfect with the world.  
Yet, all you really are is a self- doubting shell.  
Your self- love is a cover for the self- loathing that you truly harbor.

Don't rain your shower of arrogance on me.  
That personal infatuation, a blanket overtop  
The ladder you pieced to build yourself up.  
I'll smash it down with one fell swoop of my reality ax.

Flattering yourself, your greatest passion;  
Your reflection gets highest regards.  
That shiny narcissism blinds you,  
making you oblivious to the fact that  
No, I don't want to go out with you.

Oh, silly, arrogant little monster,  
Let me pop that massive balloon called your ego,  
Overinflated to the point of destruction.  
I'll bring you back down to a level less sinful.

## Echo and Narcissus Retold

I saw the words fumbled from my lips  
Hanging limp about the head of my lover,  
Expiring in the air's chill without shelter of an ear  
As his were deaf to the story I told.  
I found his faraway eyes, him still dreaming,  
Peering past me into a glassy window  
Steadily like Narcissus, the man  
Framed in waves of golden locks gazing back.

Often he has recounted for me his exploits,  
Taking every target he hunts with skillful aim  
And leaving an impression wherever he goes,  
Burning on closed eyelids long after he's gone.  
His strong voice would repeat these same stories  
Through the silence, my voice spellbound by heavy love.  
I don't know what lured him to this echoing cavern,  
The promise of a silver smooth pool of water  
And the anonymous audience of walls  
Or the thinning trail of my voice.

Quiet resumed, I was absorbed in reflection  
And said my piece in a poem.

by Lauren Walter

## Ode to Skinny Jeans

Oh skinny jeans, oh skinny jeans  
Why are you so tight on me?  
My legs are trapped in this denim prison  
And my thighs are begging to be free

I still go to the gym each week  
And cut back on the carbs and salt  
So any weight that I have gained  
Is clearly not my fault!

Oh skinny jeans, oh skinny jeans  
Could it possibly be?  
That the last time that I washed you  
You shrunk your size on me?

Oh skinny jeans, you are so fashionable  
If I could only get you past my calf  
It seems like the only way I can fit  
Is to shrink my bones in half!

Oh skinny jeans, if it was only possible  
To find a better way  
But until then it's going to be  
Sweatpants for me today

by Sara Beets

### Sinner

The threads, the kicks, at the drop of a pin.  
All stops come out, no holds bar  
For this vanity, that seventh of deadly sins,  
Useless without the others, by far.

Some green with envy over the fancy new digs.  
Make 'em lust for the guy that you know is fine.  
They'll scoff at the lazy; those sloths, those pigs.  
Don't be greedy now, thinking, "I'll make it all mine."

Pride boils over in those perfection clouded eyes.  
The gluttons will gorge, knowing they can't be him.  
There will be anger over their empty little lives.  
But, be careful now. Don't you know that it's all a sin?

by Tessa Ginn

# Fiction

## 2010-2011 student fiction contest winner:

Emperor Onion  
by Elizabeth Conderman

I was walking to class one day, as innocent as the day I was born, when I met him. All of a sudden, this slimy-looking creature appeared next to me. I recognized him immediately from a chemistry course I had taken two semesters ago. It was hard to forget that sickening grin which I had seen all too frequently as he fondled potentially dangerous combinations of chemicals in his hands. The two of us were also in the same fraternity for a while, but... No, I don't want to recall that event.

I, of course, had no intention of interacting with such a suspicious character. I tried to get away, but with no success. I stopped and faced him, ready to put him in his place, but he started speaking before I could. A twisted smile spread across his onion-shaped head.

"I'm starting up a new student organization," he said, "Wanna join?" I stopped in my tracks and stared at him in disbelief. Me? The definition of a social outcast being asked to join a club? I came to this university so far away from home seeking a new start-- a new social life filled with forgotten drunken nights, rowdy sporting events, and above all else bewitching fair-haired angel with my irresistible charms.

"C'mon," the onion continued, "What do you have to lose?" I glared at him, but he wouldn't stop. "I was there that night that you..."

"Stop!" I yelled. I couldn't bear to hear him remind me of that party-- of that night. My chance for any such idealistic campus life died on that evening. I was at a loss. In my current state of affairs my college days would slip away into the void of obscurity. But to join a club created by him? This man, this thing, so frighteningly resembling an onion-- the very stench emanating from his being. Nothing good could come from any association with him.

"I'll join," My defeated words were acknowledged with a curling sneer.

"Our first meeting will be tonight at midnight at the maintenance shed near the east end of the stadium." And like a snake slithering back into his hole, he vanished.

Suddenly I realized that I didn't know what sort of club I had just joined. So close to the stadium at midnight? There was no way this was a legitimate club! It had to be a group dedicated to the less-than-noble act of vandalism. I mentally



kicked myself for being so impressionable. But what did I have to lose? I was probably just over-thinking things anyway. We would probably just end up stargazing...

That night at midnight I arrived at the stadium entrance, concerned for what I might find when I arrived. What I saw shocked me more than any act of vandalism possibly could have. Several students were bustling around a mechanical contraption. A few were talking over blueprints, another handful was busy cranking wrenches and turning screws. The onion was seated on a tool chest like some sort of emperor eating crackers shaped like rabbits. Not wanting to disturb the proletariat class of this operation, I made my presence inquiries known to Emperor Onion.

“So you finally made it, huh?” he said through a mouthful of bunnies. I looked at my watch-- it was only two minutes after midnight. I stuttered looking for a response to counter his attack on my punctuality. Before I could speak he called out to someone working on the machine. “Hey, our pilot’s here.”

A figure emerged from under the machine. As the creeper rolled, it was as if a choir of cherubs had erupted into song. There she was, the fair-haired angel of my dreams--her face smudged with grime and her coveralls splashed with oil. She pulled herself to her feet, pulled a scrap of paper out of her pocket and handed it to me. “This is my cell number. Give me a call tomorrow afternoon.”

Too much at a loss for words, I could do no more than give my angel a quick ‘ok’. And without further ado she had slid back into her place beneath the machine. Emperor Onion had risen from his throne as I stood there with my mouth agape. “That’s all I needed from you. You can go home now.” he said with a bob of his bulbous head.

“But...but...” I stammered, “I still don’t kn...” he grabbed my shoulder and pushed me toward the door. “Details, details. You’ll know everything when the time comes. Now get lost.” he said as he pushed me out. I had no choice but to do as he said.

The next afternoon I dialed my angel’s number-- cursed with sweaty palms my fingers slipped all over the keys. She told me to meet her at the campus coffeehouse. When my eyes fell upon her, I no longer thought of her as an angel, but a goddess. Clean from the stains that had adorned her countenance last night, she exemplified my idealism more than I had previously thought.

She told me about what this club’s goal was: to construct a robot for an intercollegiate robot fighting tournament. Attending school for an engineering degree, she had thought it an excellent opportunity to get some hands on experience building something. She gave me a basic overview of the design she had created and told me why I was the perfect candidate for driving the monstrosity. Nicely put, I was the only person scrawny enough to fit into the cockpit. But I forgave her of the biting comments she made about my less-than-impressive stature when she smiled sweetly and asked me to have coffee with her the next day.

For weeks we met at that coffeehouse. She’d tell me about how the project was coming along, and she began to open up to me about herself too. When the machine-- which didn’t look like a robot as much as it looked like a tank designed by da Vinci-- was complete, she would give me instructions with a loving voice as I learned to operate it. Her dulcet voice was the only thing that kept me going

through the rough training. Never before in my life had I ever been injured so often.

All too quickly, the day of the tournament came. I promised myself that when I granted our team the victory, I would confess my undying love to my fair-haired goddess. Through several tough rounds of competition, I came out on top--crushing all other team's creations under my heel. I searched for my goddess's face as I collected our trophy. She was my real trophy, the real reason I agreed to this mess in the first place. She was clapping and smiling, and I couldn't wait to tell her how I felt. But then she turned and held a strange onion shaped object between her dainty palms, and planted a passionate kiss on it. My chest seized up with an emotion I had never felt before. Anger, grief, these words weren't enough to express what I felt at that moment.

My eye began to twitch and my feet began moving on their own. Laughter bubbled in my chest, and I had no choice but to released it. Without realizing it, I was back into the cockpit. I heard screams piercing the iron hull as I began to drive. He had to be taken care of. That curling, twisted, sneer across that bulbous, onion-shaped head had do be eradicated. He was the one who brought me into this mess. He was the one who used me to win. He was the one who caused me to be injured multiple times. He was the one who bewitched my goddess. He was the one who ordered her to manipulate me. Why? Why? Why had I been so stupid as to follow whatever the Onion Emperor had told me? In a blind fury, I rampaged throughout the campus until I crashed the tank into the lake. No one was harmed. No property was damaged.

With a deep breath he glanced at the two faces in front of him. His mother and his father, their expressions vacant. "So that, Mom and Dad, is how I got expelled from the university."

## 2010-2011 student fiction contest honorable mention:

Buried  
by Lauren Walter

Harry looked up at the church, which struck him as tall but not towering. It must have been twenty years, he thought, since he'd last been there. He ran a hand down his necktie to smooth it one last time before climbing the stairs. The steps held a small amount of gravel and Harry imagined what it would be like to pry it out. He'd keep it on his nightstand in a jar.

Walking inside, he quickly spotted the cluster of close family members. A cousin beckoned him over before he could ask himself what he ought to do.

"It was like she was right there with me," another cousin began. "I was just on the road, just driving here from my house when those heavy rainclouds started to part. The sun was peeking out from behind the clouds, real bright, and then it hit me. This ray of sunlight actually hit me while I was driving and I felt warm for the first time today. I know it was her."

Harry's family listened closely, some smiling while others nodded gently. One even put a hand on her shoulder.

"Wow," someone finally said.

Harry tilted his head to glance at the milky sky through a nearby window. The clouds were still thin and sparse, just like they'd been all day. It hadn't even been cold out.

A few relatives were looking at him so he said, "Yep... yep. Mom must really be looking out for you."

"That's great," he added after a moment. "Really great."

Harry moved toward the door. He shook clammy, wrinkled hands and nodded at whatever words were offered to him. Most claimed the generic "sorry for your loss," white noise to Harry. He was busy thinking about how to say goodbye to his mother before the casket was closed. "I love you" seemed safe, something he could easily live with, but should he say it aloud or just think it? Maybe a whisper would be nice.

"Harry, right?" asked a graying man. Harry didn't recognize him.

"Yes, I'm Harry."

The elderly gentleman took Harry's hand in both of his, slowly shaking it.

"I was sorry to hear about your mother, Harry. Deeply saddened. I played cards with Judy, you know."

Harry watched him wordlessly.

"There were times when our card club got canceled because of the weather," he continued. "Snow and such. Never when she was hosting. I saw Judy out there once, in freezing cold weather shoveling her drive. I felt a little guilt – I hired kids in my neighborhood to do my shoveling, and your mother was such a tiny woman. I offered to give her a hand but she smiled and told me she could take care of it. I've always admired her strength."

The man slipped away to seat himself before the start of the service. Harry had only half listened, instead frowning slightly at his trapped hand. He suddenly felt germly from all the greeting, a sentiment multiplied by the cool touch of air on his dampened hand once it was released. He tried to rub it discreetly on his pants.

The pews were dotted with black-clad mourners. Everything was quiet except the occasional watery sniff or a rustle as someone squeezed past to find a seat. Harry went to sit in front with family, staring at the pastor's bald spot while he waited for the church service. It had the shine of a waxed bowling ball. Though it was true that a toupee would only prove garish, Harry did wonder if the pastor ever considered a comb-over. Maybe even trimming the hair he had left would make the bald patch less noticeable. When the pastor began to speak, Harry tried to make eye contact.

"For those of you who don't know me, my name is Pastor Mark Green. I've had the great privilege of getting to know Judy over the years she spent with us. She was very dedicated to our church and often helped organize our Sunday brunches..."

A fat, black fly was buzzing loudly by Harry's ear. He delicately brought a finger there as if to scratch an itch, but the fly just circled to his other side. He pictured squashing it against the pew, its guts oozing out like a Rorschach, but that would be disruptive. That would be disrespectful. Despite his best efforts, it became even harder to pay attention when Harry thought he saw the fly humping a nearby Bible. It was his mother's funeral, for God's sake. Later the congregation sang a hymn and it drowned out the fly. Harry sang along, not too loud because he didn't sound any good, but the pastor had selected his mother's favorite worship song for the service.

"Go in peace, serve the Lord," the pastor concluded.

"Thanks be to God."

After a moment of respectful silence, Harry rose with the congregation to disperse. He smoothed his tie again. Something in his chest was welling and he could hear the blood in his ears as he approached his mother's coffin. It was the last chance to view the body before they'd bury her, the last chance to do things right. He caught slivers of the dark, polished wood between the silhouettes of other family members. Harry wished they would leave. When he looked over the lip of the casket, there she was. He wasn't sure what to do. He tried to remember if he saw anyone hug or kiss her but couldn't.

"Well, this is it," he thought. "So this is goodbye. I love you, Mom."

Harry stared at his mother, motionless in the coffin, and felt increasingly aware of the other mourners as they shuffled by. The seconds ticked on, bleeding together, with no clear distinction from one moment to the next. The only noise was a distant hum and Harry thought wildly that it must be the fly again. Surely it would be the same fly as before. He glanced sideways, searching for it, and wondered if anyone noticed. It was nowhere in sight.

"I love you," he called out to her silently, hoping to drown out the buzzing as he turned to face his mother again. It was no use, his words weren't loud enough and the fly could be anywhere, doing anything. Harry's temperature rose. He should be thinking about his mother, saying goodbye, making peace... but that damn fly. What was wrong with him? He wanted to yell, but more than that he

wanted to find the fly.

“I love you. I love you!” he thought again while scanning her face. It was like reading the same paragraph again and again without taking in a single word, except he’d never get another chance to take it in so why couldn’t he focus?

Then they closed the casket.

Harry’s eyes flicked upward to the sky as he made the drive home. Colorless save for a few dingy clouds, it hadn’t changed. The sun was still nowhere to be found. Harry parked in the garage and sat for a minute before laying his head against the plastic steering wheel. He didn’t feel like going inside but didn’t want to drive anywhere else. Besides, his gas was running low. He really should have filled up the tank on the way home, he thought. Next time he had to go somewhere, he’d probably have to leave early to get gas so he’d have enough to make it there. Staring at the near-empty fuel gauge before him, Harry wept inside his car.

The Legend of the Pipperwhill  
by Brooke Ehler

The line was drawn; the name of the town was written on the city limits - a dilapidated wooden sign - Distress. The people of Distress were so afraid to leave their simple way of life that even the mention of visitors or other towns would make them feel uncomfortable. That line was their safety net, or so they believed. The buffer between Distress and the next town was a sandy, empty desert.

The people of Distress did not care about the comforts of life, for their homes and town were in shambles. Their lives resembled the homes they lived in. The windows were cracked, the white paint was peeling off the wood siding, the doors were falling off the hinges, and the porches sagged to the point of toppling the whole house. There was an exception to this decrepit place, and that was the judge's home. Judge Valor lived in an oversized colonial home with shimmering yellow paint, white trimmed windows, and a bright red door. Even the judge himself looked as spotless and orderly as he kept his home. He was a man of time, and knew exactly where he needed to be and when he needed to be there. His court was run out of his home precisely at noon. Hearings began at 1:00 in the afternoon after he spoke with the lawyers. He did not like disorderly conduct and anyone around him would understand it quickly. He presented himself as a man who knew the law, but had compassion for those seeking it.

The opposite of the judge would be that of Mr. Dread. His home was the worst in the town. The fence in the front of his home was but a skeleton of boards, the walkway was covered in sand and rock, and the hideous steps could give way for the next visitor, that is, if there were a visitor. The porch was gray, rotting wood with a bloated, sagging entry door, and an oversized cracked window sat to the right of the door. Mr. Dread was the town's shopkeeper and he enjoyed speaking to people. He often told them stories, whether true or not, about his fearful life. That often caused the townspeople to become burdened and frightened. He was an older man with muddled hair, grimy clothes, and shoes full of holes, but he knew how to sell things. He could talk many of the townspeople into buying the Swamp Creek Bridge, located on the edge of town, if it were for sale.

Mr. Dread sometimes told the people about a strange and fascinating character called the Pipperwhill who lived beyond the outskirts of town. This legend had been around longer than the towns' folk could remember. Each person in town viewed this phantom differently. Some thought that he was a gruesome monster; others thought that he was nothing more than a reprehensible picture of evil, but all agreed that he was daunting. He supposedly watched Distress from a distance to be sure that people would stay locked in their fear, and never be able to leave. He wanted people imprisoned as he was imprisoned. Mr. Dread would tell them this "person" rode like the devil and would catch them and bring them back to Distress if they tried to leave. Sometimes he would expound on his stories and let the people know if they did not stay in Distress, they would lose everything that they had. The people became so apprehensive of the Pipperwhill that they constantly looked over their shoulder, even in town, on quiet nights. No one wanted to be alone, and no one wanted to have what little they had taken away by this fascinating, yet fearful, creature. The people were so afraid that they stopped doing many of the things they

enjoyed. Many of the boys quit going to the creek to fish, some of the young ladies quit doing after – school activities and social events, and some of the men in town quit letting their wives go to quilting bees over this horrific fear.

Word of Mr. Dread's stories reached Judge Valor. He had to put a stop to these childish rumors once and for all. He tried to explain to the townspeople that Mr. Dread's stories were not true. No one believed him though. Judge Valor determined then that he must face Mr. Dread and the so-called Piperwhill.

"Mighty fine day, wouldn't you say, Mr. Dread?" Judge Valor asked, as he looked through the beautiful animal carvings that Mr. Dread sold in his store.

"Looks like rain, if you ask me. It looks like a storm's brewin'," Mr. Dread answered pitifully. "I wouldn't leave town today. Probably get stuck out there somewhere with no one to help. And with rumors of the Piperwhill, I'd stay close by." A loud crack of thunder made Mr. Dread jump.

The judge picked out a carved eagle in flight and took it to the counter to pay for it. "Someone took a lot of time putting detail into their work."

Mr. Dread looked over the carving quickly. "Do you want me to wrap it for you?"

"No, an eagle is a symbol of freedom, judiciousness, and intelligence. If you wrapped it, it would be like putting a man in prison and suffocating him," the judge explained as he paid Mr. Dread.

"All that from a wood carvin', huh?" Mr. Dread said sarcastically.

"You know words are kind of like this eagle. You can use them for freedom, or you can use them for bondage," the judge stated as he paid for the carving. He walked to the door and added one final comment before leaving. "Too many people of Distress are not living out the dreams they have, because they are too busy living in their fears."

Mr. Dread scratched his head, thinking to himself, I can never understand a word that man says.

The judge returned to his home to find a telegram waiting for him. He ripped open the yellow envelope and found the small card. It stated: JUDGE VALOR\*STOP\* COME IMMEDIATELY TO DELIGHT\*STOP\*LOOKING FOR A PERMANENT JUDGE TO FILL OUR NEW COURTHOUSE\*STOP\*

The next day, after a long, restless night, the judge made his decision to take the job in Delight. Judge Valor walked confidently into the telegraph office. He spoke to Mrs. Natter, the telegram attendant, about the wire he needed to send back to the courthouse in Delight. He told her that he planned to accept the job as the sitting judge in Delight, which was a day's ride away.

Mrs. Natter went straight to Mr. Dread and told him the terrible, awful, frightful news.

"Somethin' must be done to stop him." Mr. Dread said harshly.

That evening, the judge was packing his final belongings when there was a knock at the door.

"What are you leavin' town for?" Mr. Dread asked harshly.

"To open the doors of the prison," Judge Valor stated. "I am going to the city of Delight, because I am their new sitting judge."

"You will be sorry; the Piperwhill will not allow you to leave. You are a

fool to think that you can leave Distress alive. If it were me, I would unpack these belongings and rethink my life. You cannot leave!” Mr. Dread shouted, turned, and stormed off grumbling loudly to himself.

Judge Valor ignored Mr. Dread’s threats and closed the red door of his home for the last time. He saddled his horse and rode silently through town holding the small carved eagle in his hand. He could feel the eyes of the town on him. Many people followed him from a distance, waiting with bated breath, as he approached the city limits. He took a deep breath as he crossed the line and rode past the troublesome sign for the last time. The people could see another rider approaching on the horizon. Judge Valor paused and looked back at Distress, now farther in the distance. The people were barely noticeable. The unknown rider stopped as he approached the judge and turned his horse. Together both horses sprinted toward the horizon, and out of sight. The judge was never again seen in Distress.

MICHAEL JUSTIN  
by Rebekah Megill

Michael Justin was alone. He lived in an apartment in a big city, but nobody in that big city bothered to ask his name. He spent every day writing music and playing his video games. He loved doing both of those things. The way he spent his days made him happy. But he knew that there was no one he made happy. Every happy person in that big city was made happy by somebody who wasn't him. Sometimes he felt so alone in his empty apartment it was stifling. Out on the streets it was so crowded with strangers he wanted to get sick.

Michael Justin's hands felt most comfortable holding his guitar. Michael Justin's eyes felt most comfortable watching the world from some place high up and isolated like his apartment window was. Michael Justin wanted a change of pace today. But a comfortable one. So he found himself outside the limits of his big, crowded, empty city and in a quiet park in a tree, holding his guitar.

His hands wanted to play, but the musical part of his brain simply refused to tell them what. So he just sat, watching the world. He listened to the animals. He watched the faraway playground buzz with kids. He felt the leaf behind him tickle his ear whenever the wind decided it should. He decided he liked sitting here. He wished there could be just one person he could show this wonderful place to. He loved this tree, and this park, and this horrible leaf, for making him happy and he wanted to follow its example.

Something new caught his eye. A young girl found the abandoned bench that faced his tree and sat down. She was pretty, in an ordinary, girl-next-door kind of way. Her head dropped. Her hands covered her face. Her shoulders shook. She was crying.

Michael Justin wanted to do something for her. Not knowing what else, he began to play his guitar. Suddenly he knew that he wanted her to know that she was beautiful. He wanted her to know that she deserved to be loved. The music caught the girl's attention. She looked up but could not see Michael Justin. He kept playing.



He began to sing.

"A girl sits on a lonely bench.  
She may be sad or discontent.  
Or maybe it's just a really bad day.  
We may never know, but who will say  
To her that she deserves much more?  
We may never have seen her before,  
But no matter what you know,  
Someone should tell her that she's so, so  
Beautiful."

It may not have been much, but it was the best Michael Justin could do off the top of his head. The girl didn't seem to know how to react at first. She kept looking around for the source of the music. But all she could see was the tree and the playground and the squirrels playing Tag. The music continued. When the last word was sung, the girl smiled.

Michael Justin wondered if she knew how her smile transformed her face. She was radiant now, as happy as she looked. She glowed from her head to her feet. Michael Justin tried to think of more to sing.

"The girl's smile brightens up the place.  
Both passion and peace flow from that face.  
She may not know how true this is.  
She may not know or even guess,  
So who can tell her she deserves more?  
We may never have seen her before,  
But no matter what you know,  
Someone should tell her that she's so, so  
Beautiful."

Michael Justin ran out of words. So he sang the last five lines again. And he sang them again. As the second verse began, the girl stood. At first she swayed. Then she twirled. By the time Michael Justin sang the last word, she was dancing. Blissfully. Gracefully. Beautifully. Like a 3-year-old in a princess dress. Like a bride on her wedding day. The longer Michael Justin's song went on, the more proof the girl gave him that it was true.

Michael Justin and the girl slowed and stopped when a voice called a name. The girl shouted back that she was coming. She never did see where that music was coming from. But, wherever he was, the girl smiled at him. Michael Justin, though hidden, smiled back. The girl did not need to wipe her eyes as she ran off. All traces of the tears had vanished long ago.

Michael Justin found himself back in his apartment that night. He had never taken off that smile. He didn't want to give anyone else that song. It belonged to the girl. She deserved one all of her own. But he kept playing it.

He loved his apartment. It was not stifling anymore.

Just Animals  
by Nick Sobottka

There was a crowd in the bar today which was more than could be said for an average day in this particular bar. This bar was owned by a girl named Jenny, and was named for her. Usually Jenny's was a semi-crowded place and not many people were attracted to it because it was a smaller clean bar, but today there was a birthday party going on, and the group didn't want to go to any other bar.

Jenny had worked hard to keep her bar clean and the patrons appreciated her effort for it. The establishment had dim lighting, and the air wasn't as stale as most other bars come to be known for. There was a dart board in one corner of the room by the bar, and a pool table on the other side. A couple weeks ago Jenny had a couple of poker tables put in next to the pool table because some people had requested it. Jenny would get in on a game or two when she wasn't too busy serving everyone's drinks, or solving the problems of the universe an alternative to one of those expensive therapists. Sometimes all you need is a full glass and an ear, and Jenny was one of those girls who was responsible, yet caring; sort of like a big sister. Just because the crowd was usually small, she would still have to have someone thrown out for being too obnoxious, but that happened once in a blue moon.

It started to get later in the afternoon, and some of the birthday crowd was starting to clear out. A girl walked in and almost had an out-of-place aura about her, but the expression she bore seemed like it was a place she belonged. Her red hair was short and seemed a little messy in spite of her wearing a nice business dress. There wasn't anything too special to be said about the dress. The colors didn't pop or anything and it was fairly simple in design. The girl walked up to the bar and sat down at the stool. Jenny walked over to the girl and gave her a smile.

"Rough day at work, Claire?" One night after work, Jenny had run across this girl with red hair, on her route home. She was looking more lost than a bird whose compass didn't point north for the winter. Claire, as she come to call herself, was trying to find the street with her apartment on it, but she had got on the wrong bus and ended up on the other side of town. Jenny had her stay the night at her place, and they got to become good friends since. Claire was always a meek individual. She always tried just hard enough to get the job done, but never put in any more effort than was needed so as not to get noticed. Jenny knew that there was a voice deep inside Claire that wanted her to excel, but Claire always was too nervous around other people.

"You could say something like that." Jenny nodded, and she went and poured Claire a drink.

"Today there was a big motivational speech for all the workers." Jenny smiled a little imagining Claire actually being motivated by the speech.

"Look, sweetie, I know it's a difficult concept, but I'm sure you can find it in you to put just a little more effort into your work. People really aren't that scary when you give them the chance." Claire looked at Jenny confused for a moment then shook her head.

"I was the speaker." Jenny stopped and stared for a moment in surprise. She didn't think Claire would have done anything that outgoing. "The person who was to do the speech called in sick."

"Then why did they ask you to do it?"

“Believe me, I wasn’t their first choice, but they couldn’t find anyone else to do the speech.”

“Why not?”

“They told me everyone else was already busy with their projects.”

“So what did you do?”

“What else could I do? I agreed to do the speech.” Claire took a sip from her glass, and stared at it a moment before returning to her story. “To be honest, I was nervous at first, but after I got into it, I started to relax. I just looked at it as another assignment I had to do.” Jenny looked a little concerned. Just another assignment to Claire meant just do enough of the work to get it done, but not so much to get noticed.

“Don’t worry, I think they were more or less impressed with the way I delivered the speech.”

“How did you manage that?”

“Well the speech was partially written from someone else, so there was a lot of enthusiasm in it, but the speech didn’t have an ending, so I had to improvise.”

“You? Improvise?” Claire let out a soft smile.

“I know, it surprised me too, but I still managed to pull it off. I actually got a few compliments after the speech. It kinda felt good.” Jenny smiled back at her friend when she heard the bar door open up. A taller guy with brown hair walked in. He had a wide grin on his face as he stared at a few others already in the bar as if he knew them. He was followed by a few other people that seemed more like he was the leader of a posse.

Claire turned around to look at the guy, and her eyes widened. She recognized the guy as the one who was suppose to do the speech today, but he didn’t seem to be ill at all. The other guys around him were also the other people who were suppose to have been busy with other projects.

“That’s him.” Claire said finally gaining some coherence.

“That’s who?”

“The guy who was suppose to do his speech today, Geoffrey.”

“He doesn’t look sick to me.” Claire knew better now that she saw him.

Geoffrey was the kind of person who everyone loved, and because everyone loved him he could get away with anything. He slowly made his way up to the bar as the ones who followed him sat down at one of the tables. Claire started to hold her glass a little more tightly as he walked up to the bar next to her. He ordered a drink, and didn’t seem to acknowledge Claire’s existence. This bothered her even more that he could be so irresponsible as to turn his back on his responsibilities like this, and yet people would let him get away with it.

“Where were you?” She had a firm and solid tone which belittled her mousey quiet demeanor. Maybe it was some combination of the adrenaline, the drink she had, and the fact she just didn’t like him, but she found herself the courage to address him.

“Excuse me?” He looked at her thinking she must have been some date he stood up a while ago.

“The speech; why weren’t you there to give the speech?” His expression changed from confusion to a more cocky and casual one.

“Oh, that. I just had an important meeting I couldn’t reschedule.” His lie was blatantly transparent to her. “I heard they got someone else to do it.” The way

he passed it off only made her angrier.

“Too bad, those people could have used my guidance.” At this point something inside her snapped, and she slapped her hand on the counter.

“You have some nerve! You can’t just go around and do whatever you want. There are consequences to your actions!” He stared at her confused again, and a little off guard. No one had ever spoken to him in such a manner.

“Excuse me, but who the hell are you to judge me? If you haven’t noticed, I CAN do whatever I want, and people are just animals meant to be controlled.” She slapped him across the face.

“I’ll tell you who the hell I am. I’m the one they got to cover your sorry ass when you didn’t show for work today!” He stood there for a moment before he recomposed himself.

“See? It did all work out then. They found someone to get the job done. No harm no foul.” She just gripped her glass firmly, finished it in a single gulp, and set it firmly on the counter with a thunk.

“This time,” she said pausing for a moment, “but someday you won’t have someone to cover for you, and that’s when it’ll all fall apart.” She grabbed her purse, paid for her drink, and walked out of the bar. Geoffrey shook his head and leaned on the counter.

“What crawled up her ass?” Jenny glared at him.

“I think you should leave.” which was more polite than what she actually wanted to tell him. He looked at her confused and wondering what is up with all these women getting on his case.

“Oh c’mon. It was just...” Jenny didn’t give him the chance to retort, and replied in a firmer tone.”

“NOW!” He took a step back as he looked into her eyes as if she could shoot fire at him just by glaring. He turned and walked over to his buddies.

“C’mon, guys. Let’s get out of here and find someplace else that’s not such a dump.” They all gathered their stuff and followed him out the door. Jenny watched them leave and shook her head.

“Animals.” she muttered under her breath as the door to the bar closed.

## The FINAL CHAPTER of NICK CARTER: The Price by Jason Hedrick

There are million ways to solve a mystery in this dark city, and then some. This particular case had me stumped, lost, staring down at the scene of the crime like a chimp trying to read a dime store glossie. But as I stood there in that empty warehouse, the musty odor of wet pallets and confusion filling my nostrils, I knew there was only one solution. I’d been on this case too long, and I had only one thing going for me: nobody knew who I was. Nick Carter. Private Dick. Me.

Six weeks ago I received a perfume-laced plea from a Mrs. Winslow that began in a way that peeked my interest:

Mr. Carter,

I don't know you, and you don't know me, but it has come to my attention that there are a number of things you would be willing to do for the right price...

She was desperate, and I guess I was too. She suspected her husband, a man of the law himself, had been murdered by some dirty cops, and for some crazy reason I believed her. I had been on the force in the past, back when I was patrolman Charles Whitaker, and the corruption got to me, too; so much so that I had to go underground, reinvent myself, and walk my way on eggshells back into the world, and into a dingy office on 125th St. Business had been pretty slow, and because of my covert situation I had to handle a number of jobs under the table. The nature of those jobs had been varying quite a bit lately, and paying barely enough to keep my gas on.

And, she was right: there wasn't much I wouldn't do for the right price. But the price was about to go up.

I knew a few things. The body had to be somewhere in the vicinity of this dank, abandoned warehouse. I knew that the man was probably shot with a service revolver, and if the murderers were cops there wouldn't be any shell casings lying around like breadcrumbs. ... And just as soon as I began to get comfortable, resting there on my own lousy assumptions, that glint of gold came winking at me from a dark corner, as the sun began to drip through the dirty windows like an unfamiliar accomplice.

What I knew was bunk, a mistake, just plain wrong. I made my way through the black puddles on the concrete floor and pushed the casing over with the brim of my damp fedora. The casing rolled from side to side, finally coming to rest and revealing a marking I had seen before. Like a tattoo on a stiff I once pegged for kicking it in a bad reefer deal, I knew what that "X" meant, and it wasn't treasure. It was Henry Hawks' gang. The rough guys. And they didn't care what they left behind, because no one in their right mind would go looking for them. But if I knew one thing about Hawks and his boys, that body was as dead as Dillinger, and no one was going to find it now. These guys knew how to get rid of a stiff, and their enemies were stashed all over and under this city for good.

The dame had it all wrong. She was right to assume the cops, but this guy was involved in more than fudged records or small kickbacks; those were just part of life on the force. No, Mr. Winslow was involved with the hard guys, but nobody told him that was a bad pony to play, and now he's probably deeper than Davy Jones' locker with a set of concrete loafers. The lady Winslow had said in her letter that she was sure it was the force behind this, but if that were the case they would have turned up the body, pinned it on some poor bum, some slob, and walked away clean. They would have all stood at attention at the funeral, and told stories about what an honest cop he was, about the time he solved the big case, about his heroic capacity for solving crime and drinking whiskey.

No. This guy was pig food. This guy had taken an acid bath like a guest of H.H. Holmes. They were never gonna find this guy, and neither was I.

I'd zigzagged all over this city to get to this place, and I was tired. I'd been in and out of every bowery dive bar and greasy spoon, and they all seemed too familiar. The past few years seemed to me now like an endless series of attempts to hide from anyone who might recognize me, endless alley ducking

with my hat pulled down and my gun tucked tight, just waiting for that moment when some former partner yelled out “Hey, Whitaker!” and put me away for good. I was tired of running.

The truth of this tale isn’t like the others, I thought, as I stood there in the new sunlight. I took the casing, walked out onto the docks, pitched the casing into the harbor, and, somewhere inside, I gave up. The worst part of it all was the lingering thought of the dame, the lady Winslow, probably sitting alone at her kitchen table, having a drink in the afternoon behind her closed slats, the emptiness of the house eating away at her. Were they in love? Could she have loved that old cop, and did she want him back? Of course she did, I thought. Even if he was a jerk, even if he was corrupt as the whole lousy system, you better believe she was alone. And all she wanted was to know. All she wanted was for someone to find the body of her guy, so she could know, so she could rest, so she could, at least, have that, if not the answers. But in this dirty business it was hard to face the fact that facts aren’t always what leads to the truth.

See, it doesn’t happen like it does in the movies. There are no white hats, no law and order, and there are a million ways it could have happened, and then some.

And me. I figured out earlier that day that I only had one thing to offer, as I sat there at my desk in front of a pile of bills that weren’t going to get paid, especially not on the inheritance of a dead city cop. I took the picture of Winslow that she had tucked in the letter, and went downtown to scour the thrift stores for the same generic shirt and tie that he was wearing in the picture, and I spent my last couple of bucks on the same cheap wristwatch he was holding up like a prize in what looked like a photo from an anniversary date, the likes of which, I thought then, I would probably never come to know. I made my way down to the docks where an old snitch of mine had said he heard gunshots around the time of the murder, and had recognized Winslow from the occasional snitching that he was doing for him on the force recently.

Could have been me, I thought. In fact, the picture wasn’t far off—same build, same hair, pretty much. He looked worn down, too, just like the reflection I had eyeballed and grunted at that morning.

Sure, I could go back to the widow. Tell her some story.

Or, I could go back to her and tell her that there is no justice in this world, and that the cops don’t always get the bad guys, and that sometimes the cops are the bad guys, and that villains are always more interesting, when it comes right down to it. I could tell her about the wrong I had done. I could tell her about the men I had killed for a handful of crumpled bills.

I could look into her eyes and try to communicate something beyond words, something she already knows. “It isn’t fair,” I might say. I would put my arm around her and say, “It’s alright now,” because sometimes that’s all anyone needs to hear.

I jingled my last couple of bullets around in my pocket as I stood there on the end of dock, the gulls circling and rising overhead. I pulled my gun out of my thrift store pants and loaded it. If I get myself good, in the face, I thought, no one will think twice. “Of course it’s Winslow,” they would say. “Who else could it be?”

Will my body float up on the shore, get tangled in some weeds? Or will I

just stay there under the docks, bobbing like a broken, discarded fishing pole? Either way, the lady Winslow will have her husband. A body. Something concrete, some closure.

A million ways, I thought. I propped the gun against my front teeth, the taste of steel creeping onto my tongue. Happy Anniversary, lady Winslow. From me, to you.

And then, I made a choice.

Pleasant Dreams  
by Len Michaels

Margaret's voice wavered as they left the tent of the Great Mephisto. "Man, that guy was weird. The crap about life being a dream – he freaked me out! And those small beady eyes gave me the chills. I was glad to get out of there." She clung to Jason's arm as she always did as they walked down the Midway.

It was Jason's idea to see the fortuneteller. He wanted to marry Margaret ever since they began dating years ago in high school. Although they had been living together for the last few years, she repeatedly refused to accept an engagement ring, or set a date. He resented her staling with petty excuses. He wanted the wedding behind them and hoped that hearing a canned "happy ending" from the carnival hustler would do the trick.

Jason raised his head and snapped at Margaret. "What did you expect? He makes his living by being weird and shocking people. It's a con. He learns about us by acting spooky while asking questions to feel us out. Then he tells us what he thinks we want to hear."

Margaret said, "Well, how did he know we were living together and planning on getting married? And that I was having some doubts. We never said that."

Jason snapped back, "Come on! Think about it. You walk in there holding my arm for dear life like you are now. You're staring at me with puppy dog eyes and a big smile. Then we ask him about what our future is going to be like."

"It doesn't take a genius to figure out that we got a serious thing going. You're not wearing a ring, so its another good bet that you have some reservations. The Great Mephisto makes some educated guesses then fills in the details as we continue to talk. The guy is a good listener and storyteller. But no magic, just skill."

Margaret said, "Well what he said about the future sucked. He sounded like my father when he used to bawl me out for screwing up. He frightened me. I'm sorry we went to see him."

Jason felt a growing anxiety in the pit of his stomach, but said nothing. Both Margaret and the old man's comments were getting on his nerves. It made him think about things he rather not think about. They began to walk faster. She wrapped her arm around his waist and Jason held her close as they always did.

The Midway was noisy as they made their way toward the exit, but the screams of people on the rides, the laughs, the shouts of the barkers in the side-shows all seemed out of place and muted now. Like a surreal background.

Jason remembered the old man's words. Odd because they were not the usual crystal ball bull shit, but more like a riddle.

Mephisto said, "You are living together in your own special dream world. Your dream together can become whatever you want it to be. However your dream will only last if you believe in it."

"*Some fortune. What an ass hole,*" Jason said to himself.

They reached the end of the Midway and walked down the side street toward their apartment a few blocks away. As the lights and noise faded, an eerie empty silence subdued even the bright half moon in the sky. Both wanted to say something but their words could not pierce the heavy blanket of silence. So they walked together, alone in their own minds.

It took ten long minutes to reach their small apartment on the second floor of a modest bungalow. Once in bed Margaret snuggled her nude body against Jason as she always did. Only then, feeling more secure under the blanket did she break the silence.

"Jason?"

"Yes?"

"You know I love you. Be patient with me. I'll make up my mind soon. I promise."

Jason rolled on his side and gave her a gentle good night kiss as he always did. "I love you too, Margaret."

"Are you sure Jason, I mean about me? About us?"

"Of course I'm sure. Now go to sleep. We'll talk in the morning. Pleasant dreams."

"Pleasant dreams," Margaret echoed in a soft whisper.

Jason felt the nagging knot in his stomach tighten. It took hours to finally fall asleep.

When he awoke the next day he opened his eyes. He saw nothing but white.

### A Very Short Story About Fruit Snacks by Tom Irish

So, I woke up this morning to my middle daughter, who's about three, trying to cram a purple fruit snack into my mouth. If you haven't ever had one, these things taste like congealed, rotten jelly. I spit it into my hand and told my girl that this wasn't a nice way to wake someone up, and that not everybody likes fruit snacks. She giggled shrilly and a little evilly, and I had trouble remembering how much I love her for about half a second. Then she started to run out of the room and I could see how dirty the bottoms of her feet were, and it somehow all came rushing back. Kids.

I went into the bathroom, slammed the fruit snack into the toilet, urinated on it, and flushed. Then I got into the shower. As I was rinsing my hair, I heard the bathroom door open. I thought it was one of the kids, so I asked "Is that you, fruit snack?" but it was my wife, who locked the bathroom door and got into the shower with me. After I finished with my hair, she slipped her hands around



my chest and then slid them down, down, down. I stopped soaping up my armpits and closed my eyes. After a few seconds, I said “Mmmm,” like I always do when I’m enjoying myself, but that’s not what came out of my mouth. What I really said was “Fruit snacks.”

My wife was startled enough that she stopped what she was doing for a fraction of a second, and even as she started up again, she asked “What did you say?”

“Nothing,” I told her “I don’t know what that was. Mmmmm.” I brushed the incident out of my head quickly and easily. There were plenty of excuses for misspeaking at that point.

But when I left the shower, giving my wife a few minutes to herself, and went into the bedroom, my son was there. He’s nine. I said “What’s up, fruit snack?” He didn’t bat an eyelash; we’re playful, fun parents, and that’s the sort of random thing we say all of the time. So he wasn’t bothered, but I was. I had meant to say his name.

At breakfast, I asked my wife to pass the fruit snacks. The two little girls were having them, but I was having cereal.

At the gas station, I told the woman behind the counter that I wanted a soft pack of fruit snacks. She sniggered, and asked me “You want those fruit snacks menthol, or what?”

All of those incidents could be excused by the hour (I’m not a morning person), or by my status as a parent, or just by general distraction. But later that morning at work, I told my receptionist to “set up an appointment with a fruit . . . .” When I heard what was coming out of my mouth, I stopped talking, which made the whole thing even worse.

Then, the capper: my boss stopped in during the middle of the afternoon. I started to sweat immediately. We made small talk for a while, about co-workers and sports, mostly. I began to think that I was going to be ok. Then he asked me, as he always does, if I had any big insider stock tips. I always blow the question off—it’s our shorthand for how much better than me he is—but this time I said “Fruit . . . .”

He paused a beat, thinking, and then said “What, frozen oj? What about that freeze last month? I’ve been hearing terrible things about oj right now . . . better check your source. Boy, I didn’t think you knew dick about commodities. Guess I was right.” And so I got away with it again, but I was definitely concerned. Clearly, something really weird was going on.

I got home before my wife and kids. That’s rare, but starting to happen more often as the oldest kid starts getting big enough to be involved with sports and lessons and stuff like that. I thought about trying to make his game, but I knew that by the time I reached the school, the game would be almost over. I called a pizza place, tried my hardest (successfully, I might add) not to order two larges with fruit snacks, and told them to deliver in an hour and a half, so everyone would be home when the pizzas arrived. Then I went outside and had a smoke. When I got back, I sat down on the couch, turned on the TV, and promptly fell asleep.

I woke up to my youngest daughter, who’s one and just learning to walk, trying to cram my own fingers into my mouth. I took them out and said “Snack! Quit fruiting my own fruit snacks into my fruit snack!”

It was getting worse.

Everyone noticed, of course, when they came into the room and I said “Snack there, guys! Fruit did the fruit snack go?” We couldn’t talk about it, though, because about 65% of my words were either “fruit” or “snack” or some combination thereof (I did the math later, after everyone went to bed, by saying 10 sentences of more than 15 words out loud and doing the percentage with the calculator I keep in my briefcase). I was making no sense.

Through trial and error we found that I could write normally. So I stopped talking all together, and for the rest of the night I passed notes that said “I’ll be right back—b-room” and “Do we have parm.?” and “what kind of fruit snacks do you want?” (this one was after dinner, when the little girls started complaining about being hungry like they do every night before bed; my son read the note aloud to them, and they had what they call “princess strawberry” and “blue razzle raspberry dogs”).

After the kids were all in their beds, my wife sat next to me on the couch and tried to talk me into “calling somebody” in the morning. I just kept shaking my head. The only note I wrote said “Too much to say. Not the right time. Take tomorrow off work. Not calling yet, though.”

She suggested that we sit at the computer so I could type because I type much faster than I write. I suggested, through a note, that we sit at the computer and look at some porn together and then let nature take its course. She went to bed. I’m still not sure why I did that. I was almost uncontrollably horny, even after my “special” shower, and in spite of the worry.

And so, here I am. It’s two in the morning, and I’m sitting at the kitchen table. In front of me is my laptop, obviously, so I can write this. There’s also a legal pad covered with checkmarks and numbers and the horrifying statistic, centered at the bottom and circled dozens of times. I’m saying sentences like “The fruit, snack fox snacked over the fruity dog.”

Also in front of me are about ten packets of fruit snacks. I got them out of the cupboard about twenty minutes ago, and have been staring at them ever since. I can already taste the mediciney, artificial slime that’s going to coat the inside of my mouth and throat soon. I don’t know what’s going on here, but this is the only thing I can think of to try.

One day, about a week ago, I found the wrapper for some blue razzle raspberry dogs at my office. It was caught in one corner of the vestibule, between the outer and inner doors. It must have blown out of my car on a previous day, worked its way methodically around the parking lot, and then followed someone inside, possibly hitchhiking on the bottom of an expensive leather shoe. I couldn’t stop looking at that wrapper; I stood there for probably a couple of minutes, thinking about how it seemed to be a conscious thing. Like a ghost, or a rat. I decided that it was trying to follow me into my office. I know that sounds stupid, or crazy, but something about that wrapper just exuded malevolence. My office is the last place fruit snacks should be.

My wife’s worried about me. She doesn’t know the half of it.

If eating these ten packs of fruit snacks doesn’t work, I’m tempted to sleep

by myself tonight. Maybe downstairs, on the couch. In spite of everything, I am finally tired. I don't want my wife right next to me, tossing and stressing and keeping me up. But I'm also nervous about being by myself while I sleep. I think if I wake up to another fruit snack being forced into my mouth by monstrously tiny, invasive fingers, it's quite possible that I will literally, completely lose my mind.

Letters to the Editor

A correspondence with Jonny Waterloo

by David Waters

Dear Editor,

My, how you rest in that valley, like a clitoris lies in the labia. Your streets and alleys run rampant with those once fond memories of youth. I grew with you. I grew inside of you like a fetus developing in the womb. Only you never took care of me as a good protector should. Instead I was ostracized from birth.

I was baptized at St. Mary's. My life changed that day though I didn't know it. I was accepted by the church for the first eight years of life. Do you remember when they through me out? Excommunication at such early age, for freedom of thought, ah, life's accomplishments, so much for liberty of conscious, right? In hindsight, I take pride at being a heretic at age eight. That was my first step away from you.

You became my care taker after you drove my father off. You became a nest for the offspring of yesteryear's generation. We came to you in droves. We patrons of broken homes found refuge in your cracks, and crevices, like cockroaches. I lived with you those last five years as I took your beatings and received your high school cookie cutter education. When you decided that I was old enough to fend for myself you offered me no guidance. You had deprived me of love, and direction. You beat me like some BDSM slave wearing a chastity device, begging for another strike in the hopes of a never coming orgasm. That was when I left you.

For four years I took up a servitude in arms. I crossed the oceans and continents alike looking for towns like you to destroy. I got my wish in 2003, so strangely similar in so many ways this city of mosques. I tore it apart like you did to me. I had my revenge on Al Saint Mary's. I gave that city a belt fed education. I beat its bound citizens. I lost my humanity in your name. When I was there I spray painted your name on its gates. I can only wonder if your name is still on that wall. Yet oddly enough; all the while, I wished to be back with you. I missed what little inexpensive charms you had to offer. I was home sick, sick for your brutality. I missed the smell of burning leaves in autumn. So I returned to you. Only I wanted to bring something back, which I did. You have another name for it, but I like to refer to it as Problematic Total Self Destruction.

When I returned there were no warm welcomes. I was not given the same respect and gratitude you displayed to the other conquering heroes. I reacquainted myself with those old ghosts, and the kindred spirits of yesteryear. I slaved in your factories, and drank from your bars. You had changed, as had I. For this short while we coexisted with one another in peace. I had gotten what I had wished for in the form of a pseudo acceptance. Beggars cannot be choosers. I was content.

But then I started to recollect. I started to remember who you were before I was born into your society. You have to understand, that in order for ones' self to know who they are, they must understand, and remember where they come from. You, my fair city, have failed at that.

I started to understand that there are two types of people within you: The natives and the people who move into you from outside for job purposes. The outsiders brought with them not only their educations, but also their sons and daughters; therefore, probably being the only thing that has kept you from inbreeding. The way how I look at it; even still, that is not raising the bar all that much. Speaking of bars, as for you fucking townies, you all breed on the bar room floors en mass. I can't walk down Main Street without bumping into a single mother of two, from different fathers every five steps!

What have you done with yourself? Don't you remember the once great history that you had? Do you not understand that there are landmarks that are abandoned by the wayside that define your identity? No, you do not. You don't give a shit about them unless it's a ruse for you to exploit and bring in the tourists. You don't even know the real name of that statue that towers over you ever so rightfully condescending. It makes you so well known across the land. I bet if I decided to come out of exile and ask 10 of your citizens "what's Black Hawk's real name?" none of them could tell me, because you mislead them for your own profit. Do you see now? You set your own people up for failure from the very begging! And you preach about your "rich history" and your rectitude, and how you're a great place to live. One day I'm going to drop a bomb on you. A contraceptive bomb.

Speaking of morals, this is where I will leave you. For such a flat land area there sure is a lot of false moral high ground around there. Yes, I speak of the reasoning for my exile; however, do you really expect me to believe that my actions of conduct overseas can be rightfully judged by your welfare elite. You know who you are. You procreate for your pay check. I find it funny how you sit in judgment of me based off your decadence. You can look that word up too, because I'm not your fucking teacher. I doubt you even own a dictionary. But then again why should you? You're all subject matter experts in every field, because my tax dollars pay your cable bill. Low income philosophers. You couldn't even defend your own argument during the trial, yet you still won with the help of your childish hissy fits.

I sure hope that getting rid of me was worth the embarrassment of demonstrating how fucking ignorant you really are. I'm no philosopher, but I do know that if I cannot back up my argument then I have done nothing but lost. You only won because of sheer numbers. It was a debate of attrition. Please take pride in your embarrassing victory. I sure as hell wouldn't.

In hind sight, I'm not even mad. I would be embarrassed to even admit I once associated myself with you. So go ahead and live your lives. I'll be progressing

myself in the arts of science, literature, history, and math. But I leave you with a warning. I will have my revenge. I will return. And when I do, I will accomplish what you fail at on a daily basis: I will give your children a proper education, where as you have failed. I will teach them who they really are and why they should be proud of the true history that you have skewered for your own greed. I will expose then to your lies. 'The Blind' I will give your children sight so they can lead you back to the right path. Do you know where that is? I'll give you a hint: Its' displayed right before your eyes. Let's see how cognizant you really are as to who you are and what's around you. Let me know when you do.

—Jonny Waterloo

# Visual Art

2010-2011 student visual art contest honorable mention is located on the cover.

2010-2011 student visual art contest winner:



Untitled  
by Redric Brooks



Four Elements  
by Jamie Lybarger



Celtic 1692  
by Karen Donohue







Untitled  
by William Brown



A Road in Kilkenny 2  
by William Brown



A Church in Kilkenny 2  
by William Brown

Spirit Summons by Alasta  
by Jamie Lybarger





Untitled  
by William Brown





Fall  
in  
by  
Alasta



by  
Jamie

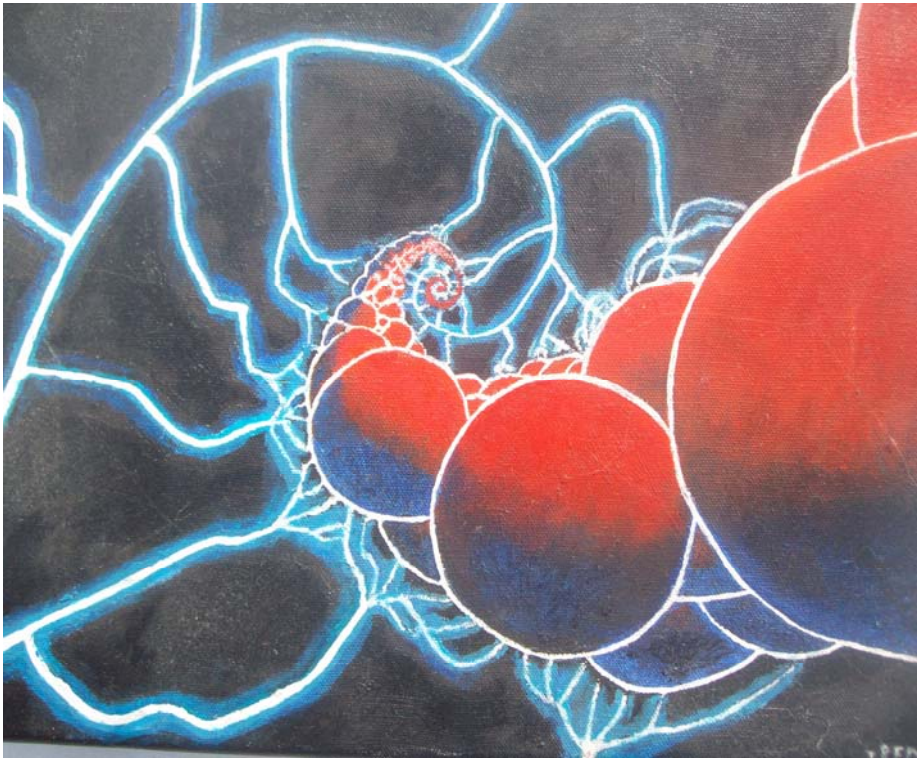


Lybarger





Suicide Bars  
by William Brown



Untitled  
by Redric Brooks



Wires, Bikes, and Progress  
by William Brown



# THE ANNE HORTON WRITING AWARDS:

*THE FOLLOWING PIECE IS A NON-FICTION, NARRATIVE ESSAY. IT IS THE WINNER OF SVCC'S ANNUAL WRITING CONTEST, NAMED FOR A FORMER CHAIR OF THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT AND A FOUNDING MEMBER OF THE SCHOOL'S FAULTY.*

## WINNER:

The River  
by Kimberly Moon

I drive over the bridge and look down to the water as I have done since I was a child. I see the cold, hard edges of the dirty ice stacked up and my body quivers with a chill. It causes a feeling of uneasiness to rise in my chest: it makes me sad. Even on a sun-filled day you can feel the frigid air emanating from the winter river.

The anxiety builds up at the anticipation of spring with its warm, soft breezes that move my hair ever so slightly. Most people become annoyed by the melting snow flooding our sidewalks and yards into a sloppy mess. I, however, embrace the scent of the neighbor's dog feces combined with the fresh, cool air that drifts in my windows opened for the first time.

As the air warms, my dresser becomes a haven to shorts, tank tops, and bikini swim suits. Flip flops quickly pile up in all sizes by the front door. Bright-colored beach towels are stacked in a clear tote along with sunscreen and warm clothes for the nighttime boat ride back to the docks. The boat has been cleaned, the dock is in, and now we await the day it's hot enough to embark on our first boating adventure of the year. Butterflies fill my stomach like I'm waiting for a date to arrive at my door, making my heart feel warm and giddy, like a school girl in love.

Finally, I wake up in a sweat from the hot, humid air, the sun peeking in my shades like it's purposely trying to alert me that the time has come. I close my eyes, take in a deep breath, and exhale slowly, then smile and stretch. My body rises out of bed without persuasion and I sneak into the kid's bedrooms, one by one, I wake them with the news. They jump to their feet without hesitation, and are ready and by the door in five minutes flat.

I glance at them as I prepare the bags of food and snacks, impatiently

waiting by the door and I remember myself as a child, a river rat, overcome with excitement. I couldn't wait to play in the sand and swim in the cold waters of the river. Even the constant availability of junk food and pop was a perk to being on the river. I could munch all day on whatever I wanted and not get into trouble. I could swim and build sand castles till my heart was content. It was like being free, no more rules and regulations.

We arrive at the dock and unload the coolers. Back and forth we walk up and down the plank. It seems like endless bags of food--gas cans, beach chairs, toys, duffle bags of clothes and blankets, and totes of towels and boating necessities. We place the items in their proper locations, as if we hadn't missed a day, and everyone takes their seats. The kids click their lifejackets together without question or struggle. I turn the key and the boat engine chugs a bit...and then no sound. My heart sinks in disappointment, and worry and sadness quickly washes over my entire body. Our eyes all turn to one another and form a fixed gaze as I turn the key again. The engine clicks and then takes off, providing a constant hum. The sighs of relief could have increased the temperature by fifty whole degrees. My daughter steps onto the dock--unties the ropes holding us in place, pushes us off, jumps back on, and latches the side door.

The propellers take us backwards, and excitement overwhelms me as I feel the boat rock with a few waves of water. A state of relaxation quickly takes over the atmosphere around us. I place the boat in gear and we move forward slowly. The hot air rushing over my skin hugs me, and I feel like I am finally home. The sound of the water rushing down the side of the boat soothes all of my anxiety, and my problems seem to fade away with the distant docks. The musty smell of the water makes its way into my nostrils, and triggers years of memories. It smells refreshing.

We cruise down the river pointing out the changes that six simple months can carve into nature's canvas. The rock at the base of the cliff has been eroded by nearly two feet, the island that used to be is no more, and the cows that normally waded in the river don't dare to brave the chill of the early spring waters.

Weekend after weekend we spend our days on the river, the sun kissing our skin. Our time is not made up of television or walls, but of each other and laughter. Our minds are open and we share our every detail with one another. We sit in our chairs, sipping cold drinks and squiggling our feet in the sand just below the shallow water's surface. The scent of barbecued chicken and hamburgers flows with the breeze, waking our stomachs to their own hunger. By midday the chill of the water invites us to escape the piercing heat of the sun's rays.

I sit and gaze at my surroundings and wonder what my life would be like without the river and how it's molded me into the person I've become today. As I submerge myself in the river, the warm sun beating down on me, I feel as if the muddy water is a portion of my soul. The dark fluids seem to imitate the thick, red blood flowing through my veins; without it, my life may cease to exist.

I've watched my children grow from birth to teens on the river over the years. I've watched their relationship with the river change as they have matured. I know that one day they will understand that the river is not just a place

for recreation, that this strong connection we hold with the flowing waters intertwines us like the fibers of a rope.

As the season closes you can see the sadness on our faces. I remember that within two short years my oldest daughter will be heading off to college. Long conversations on the phone will take over the basketball games and nightly television programs that used to hold us together over the cold, winter months. I rest easily though, knowing that even now in her sophomore year of high school, she speaks of coming home for the summer and spending her time on the river with her family and friends. It's then that I realize that I do not have to use my words to convince her of the importance of remaining close to myself and her siblings; the years on the river have already created a need for it deep within her heart.

# 2011 Film Review Contest

**Sponsored by  
the SVCC Humanities/Fine Arts department**

***The following essays are film reviews, written in response to the prompt “The Most Influential Film Director of the New Millennium.” The winners were chosen by a panel of published film critics, and attended The Big Muddy Film Festival at Southern Illinois University.***

The most Influential Film Director of the New Millennium  
by Husni Ashiku

When choosing the most influential filmmaker of the millennium it is imperative to look into cinemas past in order to find the characteristics of which to judge. The film medium is a young and ever changing, only coming to exist in the days of Edison and the Lumiere brothers a little more than a century ago. Since then cinema has blossomed into a medium arguably more powerful than any other that precedes it. Original cinematic visionaries such as D.W. Griffith and Charlie Chaplin recognized this potential, by telling stories in pictures they were able to create something that had never existed before, a cinematic experience. As the sun sets on the century mark since the inception of the film industry many masters of the art have been produced: Christopher Nolan’s innovativeness is worthy of a title as prestigious as the most influential of the decade. Through his works and many masters before him the medium has been constructed, deconstructed, and perfected.

Masters like Alfred Hitchcock and Stanley Kubrick’s unique styles lead the audience through a new frontier in the film medium where, whether the film took place in deep space or in a small apartment, the viewer was transported and simultaneously taught how to watch their incredibly revolutionary films. Directors like these are the catalysts for evolution. Not only do their techniques change the landscape of the industry but they also serve as the impetus for new upcoming filmmakers.

For cinema to move forward it is important that filmmakers look at the past to know what has been done and expand upon it. If one analyzes the works of Picasso for instance one would see the influences of his predecessors in his work. It should be understood that Picasso would not steal or copy original works instead he would take and distort aspects of others work to make his own. This is apparent in his rendition of Claude Monet’s “dejeuner sur l’herbe” (the picnic) where Monet uses his keen talents of capturing realism and paints a scene where three men are having a picnic with a naked young woman who is positioned so that the observer

is only exposed to her back. Picasso takes Monet's painting and virtually cannibalizes, chews up, and spit's it out. In Picasso's version we are confronted by tiny heads and huge bulging breasts, but by doing this Picasso leads us to think more deeply about Monet's original, enigmatic picture. (Richmond) Picasso's manipulation of Monet does not recreate Monet's work but transcends it.

In film, Quentin Tarantino, arguably the most influential director of the 90's, utilizes the same technique by wanting to do his own version of every genre. Across Tarantino's body of work references of film history can be found stemming from his childhood influences such as Sergio Leone, Jean Luc Godard, and Kubrick. For example, in his newest film *Inglorious Basterds* (2009) the beginning is an unmistakable nod to Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968). Tarantino's mastery shines in his re-workings and manipulations of genre and juxtaposing them within his films along with distinctive dialogue, play with story-line, and narrative. Tarantino applies his knowledge of the history of cinema as a jumping off point and, through his writing and directing, transcends the original contexts to think more deeply about what he's trying to communicate.

The question still stands, how does one choose the most Influential director of the millennium and who is he/she? A list of characteristics should be devised in order to guide the selection more efficiently. These following characteristics will be imposed on the chosen filmmaker as these are basic prerequisites in light of the question levied: First, are most if not all of the filmmakers works introduced after the millennium? This question filter's from the decade master's like Martin Scorsese who is undoubtedly influential but not a product of the millennium. Second the works originality. Many directors imitate but true masters explore unconventional cinematic grounds. Tarantino's "heist film" *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), in which he never shows the heist, is an excellent example of his inventiveness and original quality. The final characteristic is the filmmaker's use of the vocabulary of cinema and how well it is integrated into the picture to voice the truths their respective pictures hold, a basic skill all cinematic masters possess.

Judging by the characteristics that lay above the optimum candidate whose innovativeness is worthy of a title as prestigious as the most influential of the decade would be, Christopher Nolan. Over the course of the decade Nolan produced six features, among them, the famed re-booting's of the Batman franchise whom were without question two of the most popular films of the decade. It's his innovative style, though, that's sets him apart from the rest a style in which he peruses ideas of illusion, reality and, identity in such films as *Insomnia* (2002) and *The Prestige* (2006) that over the course of the narrative puts the audience to the test. Examples can be found in *Memento* (2000), by telling the story of Leonard, out of order to exemplify how his short term memory-loss condition handicaps him. Simultaneously this puts a strain on the audience by putting them in his shoes by always having to string together information given to understand what each interlocking scene means to the previous one. In *Inception* (2010), Nolans most recent film, he puts the audience through a labyrinth like experience where if not watching closely could weigh heavily on their understanding of the film. He uses the conventions of genre, framing, and film archetype like colors on an artist pallet to express his vision and paint the complex hero, Cobb. While skirting across genres like psychological thriller and noir, the audience follows Cobb in his recreations of

the past through dreams he's built inside his mind.

The most interesting point Nolan puts forth in his most recent picture is the idea of architecturally recreating lost worlds. In a way this is a reflection on cinema itself. *Inception* is not a movie about cinema, but rather a reflection of cinema's past. In this picture Nolan takes the premise of film as a dream machine, something that has inspired such avant-garde filmmakers like Mya Daren and Stan Brakhage, where one can literally live inside the past.(Taubin 32) It is in this idea that Nolan is stating that the past is important. That one can not only dream of, but learn how to live in the present, how to live in the future, and most importantly find inspiration from the past. Nolan's statement of the past shows up, in huge writing, in all of his films and is message of true substance not only in art and cinema but life as well.

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*Nolan*  
by Justin Jones

What kind of characteristics does an influential director have? There are the stereotypical characteristics, intelligent, creative, and hard-working. Those are always good characteristics to have but to be “influential,” I believe it comes down to how you feel when you watch a movie by that director and if that feeling long remains after you have seen it. That is what director, Christopher Nolan, does to me. I have sat in the theater for two of his movies and watched two others at home. I couldn’t take my eyes off the screen. I didn’t even move, as I remained glued to my seat. I felt my heart begin to race during the climatic scenes and my heard almost stop during the parts that I didn’t see coming.

Christopher Nolan has been one of the most successful directors in the last ten years in more ways than one. Nolan usually works with and alongside his brother, Jonathan Nolan, who helps create the story. *Memento* (2001) was about an unpublished short story that Jonathan wrote. Christopher directed it and it become his first popular hit. He was nominated for awards and won many of them, including the Sundance Film Festival’s Waldo Salt Screenwriting Award. The movie was one of a kind. It dealt with a man, Leonard Selby, dealing with memory loss. He can only remember things for a short period of time. He gives himself tattoos or writes on himself so he can remember events that took place. Leonard knows that his wife was killed by a robber in their house and is trying to solve the mystery while fighting his memory loss. Along the way he meets characters Teddy and Natalie that might or might not be taking advantage of his memory loss. It all leads up to a terrific ending in this epic thriller. The style for *Memento* is what makes it even more special. It opens with the ending scene and then takes you back to the beginning. When you are watching this movie, you will watch a scene and then it will go back to a scene you have already witnessed, but then give you a little more of the scene it ended on. It constantly repeats this pattern building suspense. I have never witnessed anything like that in a film and I believe that is why it was so successful and is truly unique.

In 2005, Nolan launched his Batman project with *Batman Begins*. He wanted Batman to be represented in a style like no person has ever seen. He wanted Gotham City to be dark and sinister. Batman was going to be this hero in the shadows and people were going to be in distress. I believe some people thought he wouldn’t pull it off but he did, in fact he completely reinvented Batman! *Batman Begins* opened the door for the most anticipated sequel probably of all time. *The Dark Knight* (2008) was Nolan’s best movie as far as the box office. It made over 500 million dollars worldwide. It inspired all people from comic book fans to people who have never been interested in Batman. Even though Batman isn’t Nolan’s original concept because Bob Kane created Batman and D.C. Comics published Batman, he successfully brought us the touch and storyline that I believe all Batman fans have wanted to see. Nolan was nominated and won several awards for the *Dark Knight*, many of those at the Academy Awards. The style of *Batman Begins* and the *Dark Knight* was how Nolan used his background and characters. The background was dark and showed how Gotham City was in despair. His characters like the Joker and the Scarecrow displayed how crazed and evil these adversaries of



Batman really were. Batman himself was strong, bold, and elusive. On the other side, Bruce Wayne, was clever yet mysterious. Many fans, including myself, are now anxiously waiting for Nolan's third and final Batman movie that will come out in 2012.

Inception (2010) is the latest film that Nolan has directed. It was about Dom Cobb, a thief who can steal someone's subconscious. It is almost impossible to write about and describe this movie just because it was such pure genius. Nolan spent ten years creating this screenplay and considered Memento to be just a warm up. Inception contained mind blowing special effects and a storyline that is was so "deep" that the average person might not even bother to understand it. As far as originality and true imagination, Inception is my favorite Nolan movie. It was a great success in the box office and enjoyed by millions. The concepts about dreams leading into other dreams and how the characters intertwine with each other is nothing but magnificent. I'm eager like many others, to watch it again when it comes out on disc. To me, if a director casts a movie that people constantly think about and want to watch, than you have been truly influential and deemed a great director.

Nolan had directed seven films. In looking at Yahoo! Movies, the average grade on his films is a B+. The highest grade is an A, for the Dark Knight, and his lowest grade is a B-. I believe that that is really remarkable considering that as an avid movie fan; I see a lot of directors getting C's and usually no higher than a B. Inception was the only movie that was an original piece when it was released. Every other movie was a movie based off a novel, a remake, or a sequel. His style is like no other director that I know of. Nolan will continue to surprise us with even more amazing films. Christopher Nolan is influential. Christopher Nolan is a genius. Christopher Nolan is unique. Christopher Nolan casts brilliant actors like Christian Bale and Leonardo DiCaprio. But most importantly, Christopher Nolan puts passion into his movies that causes the viewer to feel multiple emotions. Emotions that make them respect and love his films.

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