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## FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

After three years, I am still amazed and excited by the work being produced by the undergraduate community. This issue offers great diversity, featuring writers from varying schools, states and even countries, who all exhibited a uniform excellence. As a staff, we have had the privilege of seeing first hand, the evolution of Pittsburgh's young writers, and the ways in which they experiment in their work. I have an incredible admiration and respect for the bravery and thought put into each of these pieces.

I would like to personally thank each of the talented writers who submitted pieces for this issue, as well as congratulate those of you published this semester. Special thanks to Collision's staff, which has not only tripled in number, but consistently brought their humor and enthusiasm to each meeting. Also, our layout team, for making this issue exceptionally beautiful; to the editors: Lauren, Colin, Nicola, Ryan and Michele, for being endlessly helpful and lastly, to each of our readers, I hope this issue both engages and surprises you. Thank you so much for your support.

Graciously,  
Lizzie Harris

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FIRST PLACE

# Tranlastion

6

*Hong-Thao Nguyen*  
University of Pittsburgh

## TRANSLATION

in/of Sài Gòn

sails mosquito blush  
and cockroach harvest antler  
near earth mangosteen

tale morning echo  
fish simply orange daughter  
invade among temperate

children run hanging jesus  
see through pubescent boys  
bà ngo\_i lips pull

or milk leaf southing  
monk letter burning  
rambutan puppet show

remind oxen beads  
wheels mothers mothers  
conical hat weaved pagoda

paint color bird wing  
layer grow inspired  
hidden knocks for flame

guitar hair mentions  
rasp volume all shaved  
these ring wave steaming

“Perhaps I will leave you.”



SECOND PLACE

When I think of the  
fact that I think  
I love you

*Tracy Lingenfelter*  
*University of Pittsburgh*

WHEN I THINK OF THE FACT  
THAT I THINK I LOVE YOU

I think of the way my legs felt  
The day I found my dad  
dead one June morning  
and tried to run through the backyard  
to get my sister  
daydreaming on the dock in the sun.  
The way I thought I'd fall  
with each dizzying step  
heavy and unable  
As between breaths I tried calling for help  
Panicked and scared and young.





THIRD PLACE

Ivy

*Emily Stokes-Hallett*  
*Dickinson College*

## IVY

Come into this place — it  
was the whisper of spring  
like a step into the fantasy of childhood,

where I as a young girl  
might descend the staircase into  
a day of promise, into

a kitchen where  
the floors went unswept and  
the windows had no curtains,

where my mother and I  
looked out on the field that  
was ours to admire —

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It was as though we'd imagined  
that our land, our donkeys might roam  
perpetually through the ragweed,

their equine tails flicking,  
jaws grinding.

And not that, in the crescendo  
of morning spring,  
we might instead see a hanging  
against the ivy fence;

Still as a painting about home,  
there she was, our jenny —  
strong neck broken like  
the flowers we'd picked,

her grey face was turned  
so violently towards heaven,  
her head caught by the halter  
on a single splinter of cable wire.





HONORABLE MENTION

# Tart Thoughts

*Samantha Brooks*

*University of Florida*

## TART THOUGHTS

I have never heard this  
Boy speak so eloquently  
As when he speaks about  
Key lime pie.

The perfection in its curve,  
The smooth ride of its  
Texture;  
It seems to hold all of  
God's answers  
For him.

14      Odd, I think. Odd.

This is a poem about key lime pie.  
I have hit an all time low.  
Low.  
Low.  
Low.  
Like the pan in which the pie was made.  
Metal and perfect and low.  
Low like his voice as he looked at me  
With eyes full of  
Wonder,  
Bringing his first taste  
Closer and closer  
To his eager tongue.

Incredible, I think.  
The power that a pie  
Can hold over a person.  
Hypnotic flavors,  
Entrancing dessert.

Who would have known,  
Had he not eaten that pie  
During our lunch time  
And discovered all the secrets of  
The world,  
Sitting on his fork.



## THE CYCLE

*Kelly Forsythe* • University of Pittsburgh

By now, we know  
the crests: the bird falls  
to be risen again in  
autumn,  
in Pennsylvania.

I have given up on  
verifying to you  
my work as a certainty;

I recognize the  
void when I speak of  
the one thing that explains  
my existence —  
can I foreshadow?

The things I'd gladly give to  
soften the ache of art---  
graft the validity of our  
relationship into a weather-  
based filament

Maybe, we as a spectacle  
can only offer the depth  
of hand holding, rather than  
the shuffle of an unwrapped  
jewel; as two vacancies lit  
up, untamed.

TO DAWN TO

*Stephanie Luczajko* • University of Pittsburgh

build log cabins in the  
rubble of thrashed  
tobacco and two-by-fours  
turned cinder  
the people breathe deep

relief  
in through crooked blinds and  
morning commute curling off morning  
coffee  
faint shadows like mold      inside  
the mail box

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## THE WEAPON WAS ON SAFE

*Michel Sauret* • University of Pittsburgh,  
United States Army - Iraq

“By the way,” he said. “In case anything should happen, you’re in the General’s backup seat.”

That is what he said. And right away, I had a bad feeling about this trip.

“What do you mean?” I asked, as I slapped a magazine into my rifle and pulled the charging handle. Locked and loaded, weapon on safe but very much red. General Buchanan didn’t believe in going amber outside the wire.

Our convoy merged into traffic and peeled tire onto Route Tampa.

“If we get hit,” said the Sergeant, turning around to look at me from the humvee’s front passenger’s seat, “you’re going to have to get out because that’s General Buchanan’s backup seat.”

“But that’s only if something bad should happen, right?” I asked, more for reassurance than for clarification.

“Right. But do only as I tell you. Don’t be getting out or sightseeing if the convoy gets hit. You stay put until I tell you. But if I tell you to

get out, you get out.”

“Okay,” I said, because really, there was nothing else you could say to that.

“At that point you’re on your own. But then again, so are we.”

On your own. What in the hell did that mean? Were they going to leave me stranded in the middle of a firefight, in the middle of Iraq, in the middle of war? Just to give an old man a seat? I remembered then a sentence from the Soldier’s creed. *I will never leave a fallen comrade.*

I had never had a bad feeling about a convoy before that moment. Even when I was riding in an MRAP heading to Iskandariyah and the gunner said, “Hey guys, my turret’s stuck. Somebody help me. Somebody do something. I can’t get it to move.” He was facing twelve o’clock when he should have been facing six because we were the last vehicle in a row and now our backs were turned. That gunner messed around with his turret for twenty minutes before he finally got it to swivel, but afterward we were laughing and even though I braced myself for the worst, ready to engage just in case an insurgent decided to attack us, no bad

feeling had come. Even with the gunner's turret stuck, I had felt safe. That's because we were in a shell. That's because—at worst—we could stay inside.

This time it was different.

This time I felt like I'd been whacked with a rug beater, all of my sense of security flying off like dust.

I didn't take a nap as I usually would. I watched the roads, my finger tapped the trigger like a twitch just to make sure it was there, ready to squeeze. But I also made sure the weapon was still on safe. I didn't need to look. I touched the selector switch with my thumb. It was on safe. But I kept touching it to make sure. I kept touching it because just two weeks earlier I had come a thumb-flick away from killing a fourteen-year-old Iraqi boy.

But I didn't think of that for now. Not on the surface at least. I thought of the roads and the markets and the people—all of them outside the shell of our humvee, wondering if this might be the day I would use my weapon on something other than a paper target. I didn't want to think of that, but I did because before deploying to Iraq I made myself a promise that I would think of Heather the moment I had to

squeeze the trigger. Because Heather wanted me home, and I damn better be on the lookout because this bad feeling rode my spine like a parasite.

*I don't want to get out of this vehicle, I thought... and realized the craving of my cowardice. Why does this seat have to be the General's back up? Why not another?*

My questions rambled on, each leading up to the next like the pegs on a ladder. These were questions that once I asked them, I had no choice but to keep climbing.

How is the General any different from me if we come under attack? How is his life more valuable than mine? How is it he has a whole detachment of Soldiers trained and ready to give up their lives to defend his? How is the one star velcroed to his chest is any different from the chevrons and rocker velcroed to my own?

I knew the questions at face value. They were those of a coward who at best didn't want to lose his life and at worst didn't want to save someone else's. And yet, I had nothing to be afraid of. I had gone out on missions outside the wire several dozen times, locked-and-loaded and never fired a shot. Whenever I returned to base after missions, it was always the same, orange-tipped tracer round that catapulted

out of my ejection port. It was always the same round I had to bend down to pick off the ground, blow off the dust, and slide back into the magazine.

Iraq was a place where I felt safe.

I have feasted with tribal sheikhs and sipped their wonderful black tea. I have taken hundreds of pictures of children smiling, joking and laughing with U.S. Soldiers. I have even stripped off my ballistic vest out in the open during ceremonies and as a guest of Iraqi households.

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Yet that bad feeling climbed the ladder of my spine with one question reaching up the next.

I wondered then of Brigadier General Buchanan's position, a man with age in his face but youth in his eyes. A man whose wit and battle knowledge could put to shame all my life experience. He's been in the Army longer than I've been alive. And yet, just a man. Just a man like me. A life like any other.

He's a one-star general but he could have been anything. A pharmacist. A professor. A farmer's step-son, grown to own only a fraction of the land that his father's blood has inherited.

Here in Iraq, though, Buchanan was

escorted everywhere by a personal security detachment of Hooahs ready to give their lives for him at any moment and push a Sergeant out of a truck so the star could take that seat as well. How many students would take a bullet for their professor? How many might give up their seat on a bus so Professor Buchanan would not have to stand on the way to work?

I realized then, it was not the man we were protecting, but the position. It was the star, not the face.

I wanted to defy the consequences of that conclusion. *I didn't pick this seat*, I wanted to object.

Outside, I saw murals painted in a flash of colors. A long wall painted by row after row of fluorescent slashes. We drove through a market. The rain continued to fall in a drizzle. It was this rain that had put me in this seat.

I was supposed to fly that day, but this rain had cancelled all flights. It rained no more than a quarter inch of water but it was enough to turn the place to mud and clump like crud under your boots. As soon as the rain started, we all knew nothing was going to fly out of FOB Kalsu, a base in the northern region of Babil Province. So when I saw Buchanan walking

into the dining facility later that day, I praised God because I now had a chance to catch a ride back to Camp Victory. I thanked God, knowing I had a chance to leave Kalsu that day when I could have gotten stuck for three more days at least. And now I was cursing chance for the seat it had brought me. *I didn't ask for this seat.*

All because of a little rain.

Riding in that truck, I braced for a fight. I braced for a war I had not yet experienced in seven months deployed to Iraq. For the first time ever, I didn't feel safe in God's forgotten Eden.

I did picture us coming under attack. I pictured the Sergeant in the front seat shouting at me to get out. I pictured my body twitching, soaked in fear, pulling on the battle locks, pushing open the six-hundred-pound door and laying down suppressive fire, giving the General enough cover to find his way to my seat. His seat. Whatever.

Would I be brave if all this happened? Would I be killed? Would I die in honor, or in shame? How many would I kill before they managed to bring me down? And what if I survived?

I pictured someone shouting, "Protect the General! Protect the General at all costs!"

Who was shouting that? Whose voice was it?

And then I realized... that it was me. Save the star. *Protect the General*. I am no brave soul, but I realized one thing that moment in the midst of my thoughts. I would fight. Scared or not, I would fight. And I would fight until I spent all my rounds, killed all my enemies or was shot to death myself.

Those thoughts, somehow, brought me back to the day I almost killed a teenage boy by accident. I had gone out on a mission with Hell Raiser Platoon to distribute a truckload of fertilizer to a group of local farmers near the town of Jabella. When we arrived to their farm, the men greeted us and praised our efforts. The tribal sheikh was so happy he offered to slaughter a goat for us in our honor and prepare us a feast. He was even going to let us pick the goat. The farmers directed the teenage boys to unload the bags of fertilizer from the truck. I took pictures of them working with my Nikon D200, taking shots from every angle. I decided to climb the truck so I could capture them in my photos from above. As I climbed the side of the truck, my rifle swung while clipped to my vest. My camera dangled from my neck.

I reached the top, took one step, and lost my balance.

I fell back, clutching my rifle the way you might a railing in hope it will save you from falling. My fingers squeezed and my hand bumped the magazine release, but a round was already in the chamber. When my back hit the pile of bags, I saw one of the boys looking down at me. He smiled. The muzzle of my rifle was pointed straight at his face. My index finger gripped the trigger tightly.

I released it. Slowly.

The only reason I didn't kill the boy was because the weapon was on safe.

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The difference between his life and death was the distance from safe to semi. Nothing more than the flick of a thumb.

Thinking back to that moment reminded me there were no chances in life. There was little margin for chance to play a role. Everything was deliberate. Everything had intent. You were either on safe or you were on semi. Your weapon was either green or it was red. There was no amber. There had been plenty of times before that day when I would find my weapon on semi, realizing I had accidentally bumped it to kill mode.

That day I hadn't. That day I didn't kill a child because of that.

Did this boy live because of *chance*?

Thinking back to that changed my mood as I rode in the General's backup seat, realizing that this was his seat—not mine—all along. I was there only for the ride. I embraced the bad feeling suddenly. If we came under attack, I would fight. I would shout, "Protect the General," and I would squeeze the trigger for as long as it was necessary. If Buchanan was meant to be a professor, he would have been a professor. If his purpose in life had been to fill medical prescriptions or till land instead of directing Soldiers, he would have been just that.

27

Maybe it was the man we protected after all. Maybe it was the man who was picked for the position. Not the position for the man.

In the end, nothing happened.

And if you're disappointed by that, then there's little I can tell you.

We made it back to Victory as any other day, and when I pulled the charging handle to clear my rifle, it was still the same round that ejected. It was the same round as always I picked off the ground, blew off the sand and pressed back into the magazine.

## SANGUINE

*Andrew Sullivan* • University of Pittsburgh

60-watt fluorescence stings at the slightest touch,  
yet cools the room in impeccable solitude  
as my bare torso dries through humid September  
and glides through sleepy sterility,  
gaunt, alone.

And one's mind slips to a night  
when my five-day old beard might matter  
as it burnt your chin and brightened my eyes,  
which have become cold streetlights  
cutting through the scalding city haze  
to fall on your forehead,  
like the stained steel of a scalpel  
drawing torrid blood in a pristine  
OR while nurses in white scrubs  
surround you as in a dream from which  
the chemical charring of lye  
on your wrist  
wakes you.

You are warm, wet, dirty.  
You are quiet, weak, drowsy,  
and romantically cleansed.

## THE TIME THINGS BECAME CLEAR

Josh Barnes

A carnival funhouse  
full of s-bend curves  
and blowhard hooknots  
erodes high-tide holes  
into the bones  
of my gaping velcro eye.

The air is gritty like silt  
and I am underground.  
Biped wormheads  
squirm around, gasping  
for fishhooks to end  
numb floating;  
they are weightless

and I don't know whether  
I am walking or  
fractal wax melting  
across red canyons of woodgrain  
where little people  
grin slit-neck  
from the depths in the cracks.

Someone lights a cigarette  
in a sonic boom that  
jettrails from zigzags into  
a doubling, tripling web —  
neon tube gossamer — like Las Vegas  
planned by things with too many legs.

The ghost of my grandmother, with four heads,  
materializes  
in the negative space —  
the crystal blisters in her eyes  
shining, melting, turning in paisley  
churners that make my hairs hurt.

30

She speaks:  
“Duende trout start; the ice-man reaches deep  
in the light of a corpse. Listen blue  
for missing nails.”  
This mouth spews velvet  
to a witch-burning valiant,  
but the crust of old rainbows wraps the verbs.  
Again, from a different head:  
“Guns.” A pause: “Guns.” Leaden marbles  
drop from diamond coal holes.

This head swirls sideways, half-focused:

“Do you want to hear the story  
of Long John Silver?”

it politely asks.

Seafoam threads of whitefish  
bubble under memories of forgetting  
—purples ringed in blue.

Heart explosions. My blood is a weightlifter.

“This is a natural part of natural parts,”  
the last head whispers.

I am without breath,

Brick-wall stunned by flashing eyes...

Centipede streams squirm between  
jawstones made of cheese.

She smiles at my depths  
of twenty thousand leagues;  
soft, soft, soft comes the light:  
“Don’t force it, you’ll break it.  
Glisten just enough.”

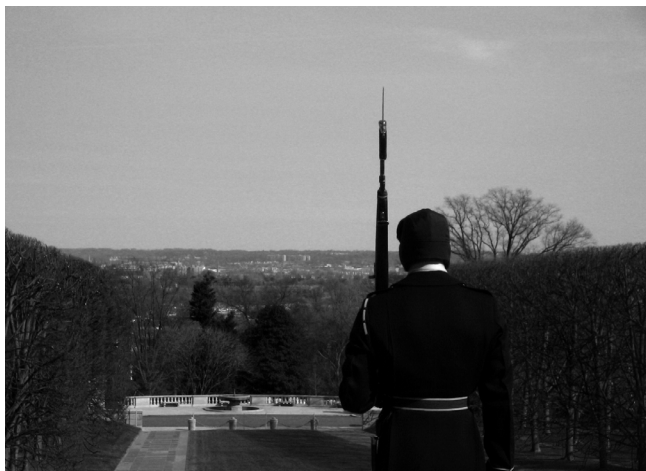
The air slips down.  
Through my skin  
I see my bones.







JEN ZETTL



35

ALICIA SALVADEO



ALISHA LINESWALA



37

LYDIA BASS



STAFF SUBMISSIONS  
MOTHERS AND STEPFATHERS  
*Nicole Boss*

Sprouting glass from a  
Sea of knowing bones  
As sand.

She listened while her  
Mothers nose broke,  
Currents abrading  
matter.

38

Waited for him to  
Come alone, into her  
Or a sister's room.  
She could not have  
Been her bones  
All those times.



## STAFF SUBMISSIONS

### THINGS THE LIP-SYNCING ORPHANS SANG ABOUT

*Alicia Salvadeo*

East Carson Street's got more tattoo parlors  
than places to eat, and pedestrians slight  
whichever side is in the sunshine  
for the easier shade—I've got nickels,  
got dimes & so on  
rhyming in my ladle hand  
as you ask—this is the second time you ask,  
seven weeks after the first time you ask—  
you ask for some

change

39

for a hamburger over there

The first time you held out your hands  
it was a new kind of prayer, 'Spare me some

change

for a hamburger over there Amen' (I'm no man  
and I'm no God either but today I feel like some kind of  
savior) I pour the coins into your metacarpal bowl  
blistered and cracking like birthday sparklers  
You slip them into your back pocket  
You don't look at me but say 'God bless you' with no teeth  
And I leave you hunched in the mulch  
near the marigolds, swinging black bags  
after another Salvation Army spree,  
bags as heavy as the leaden ones

under your eyes, and  
I hope we'll meet again —

I want to ask how you can live with no teeth  
because at night I dream they leave me, too:

one tooth or two in front, a row & so on  
One by one the buildings up and pluck  
themselves from the street like vagabonds  
without the bleary tenants, no

rent no roaches no problems

All that's left's a block of empty lots,  
a mouth forsaken and salivating, no  
salvation in the fingers of dental hygienists

probing at dead radicles: in my dreams  
the dentists are the terrorists

and I avoid them at all costs

Jab the teeth back into my mouth myself

my naked gums my concrete

foundations my vacuous smile

This never works, or

it is a temporary fix, and I wonder if your fix

is a really sandwich/Grandma cleans her fake teeth

after every time she eats/Do you own a toothbrush,

Maybe some mouth

wash

Hey, hobo man, you're never

fully dressed without a

smile



## STAFF SUBMISSIONS

### LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS MEN

*Colin C. Post*

The boys are standing in the yard and  
I'm sitting at the dinner table.  
They're trying to put berries in a can.

They drop them in and they hit with the bland  
plunk of someone clipping a loose cable.  
The boys are standing in the yard and

I'm watching how they move their hands:  
one to drop, one to keep the can stable.  
They're trying to put berries in a can.

41

Up the gravel road comes my husband.  
As his worn truck passes through the maples,  
the boys are standing in the yard and

he heads towards them, churning up the dust  
with his whining tires until he's no longer able  
to see them dropping berries in a can.

He'd left to give the deed to a man  
Who says things like, "We'll see." "If I'm able."  
The boys are standing in the yard and  
they're trying to drop berries in a can.



## STAFF SUBMISSIONS

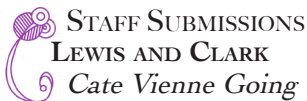
### VISITATION OF BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

*Sarah Beauchamp*

The smelly boy next to me, leaning in closer,  
breathing heavy — calling me a lesbian because  
I won't be his girlfriend  
What's a lesbian?  
Mommy as she curls her hair  
tells me that ever since that Ellen came out, everyone  
has been obsessed

42

I hope it's not something we need to know  
before mass  
I hope I don't make eye contact with the priest  
Receive the stiff, dry, tasteless circle and touch  
my forehead,  
chest and shoulders  
Hope to god a nun doesn't see the host brush  
my back molars  
or ask me what a lesbian is.



STAFF SUBMISSIONS

LEWIS AND CLARK

*Cate Vienne Going*

You, boy with the golden hair. My best friend  
from two to eleven.

Memories pulse through my mind, flickering  
through like a movie reel.

Do you remember those hot Virginia summers?  
The air, thick with humidity.

Our homes nestled in by the calm lake, the  
Blue Ridge Mountains towering beyond the  
vast water.

Switzerland in Virginia.

From tricycles to electric go-carts we would  
ride, buzzing down the street and around the  
cul-de-sac. Wind streaming through our hair.

Our tan bodies accustomed to outdoor play,  
we would search for arrowheads in the woods.  
The trees offered shade, with patches of light  
glimmering through the branches.

Spying on neighbors, keeping a detective journal  
of our discoveries.

Sailing on the weekends.

Explorers, masters of our own craft.

Selling cups of lemonade for a quarter, catching fireflies in the dark.

We made magic.

That sun, those stars were ours. Surely they were made for us.

Dancing on my driveway in the pouring rain, our drenched clothes clinging to our bodies.

To feel so alive, to be so free.

On my eighth birthday you gave me a ring – a small silver band that fit perfectly.

I still have that ring. It barely fits my pinky finger now.

The night before I left for Pennsylvania felt so profound and slow.

Walking towards home quietly together, everything felt so final.

At my driveway, a goodbye kiss. A fluid motion, like something from the movies.

Your lips, soft.

It was so easy.

Months after I had left, I returned to find that you, too, had moved. We left for opposite sides of the coast, on to lead separate lives.

I wonder how you are, who've you become –

And I am brought back to the days we spent together.

My childhood, our childhood.

How wonderful, to feel so full.



