

# SCHOOL IMPROV

AN HMC STUDENT  
ARTS PUBLICATION  
JANUARY, 1991



# SOLE iMPROV

ISSUE 2, VOL II

AN ARTS PUBLICATION OF HMC

JANUARY, 1991

## The Greditor Speaks

This time I'm apologizin', and ain't no one gonna stop me!

I was going to open my last Greditorial with an apology for that issue being late (which it was, due to the time required in fixing financial things), but a few of my advisors told me not to, because they thought it was too wimpy to open my Greditorial carrier with an apology. And they were probably right. However, this time I really feel that I need to apologize for this issue's lateness. It was, unfortunately, more or less all my fault (which is why I'm apologizing, obviously). The lateness of the first issue, combined with the end-of-the-semester crunch (which I'm sure most of you can sympathize with) conspired to prevent this issue's completion prior to last semester's end. However, I stayed (in fact, am staying, even as I write this) after my finals and finished the issue before I left for winter break, so that it wouldn't get in the way of the two scheduled issues this semester. Hopefully in

## CONTENTS

### Greditorial

The Trial

Futility

The Beach

Photographs by

Jason Goldberg

One More Novel

Idol

Running

Muddamorphose

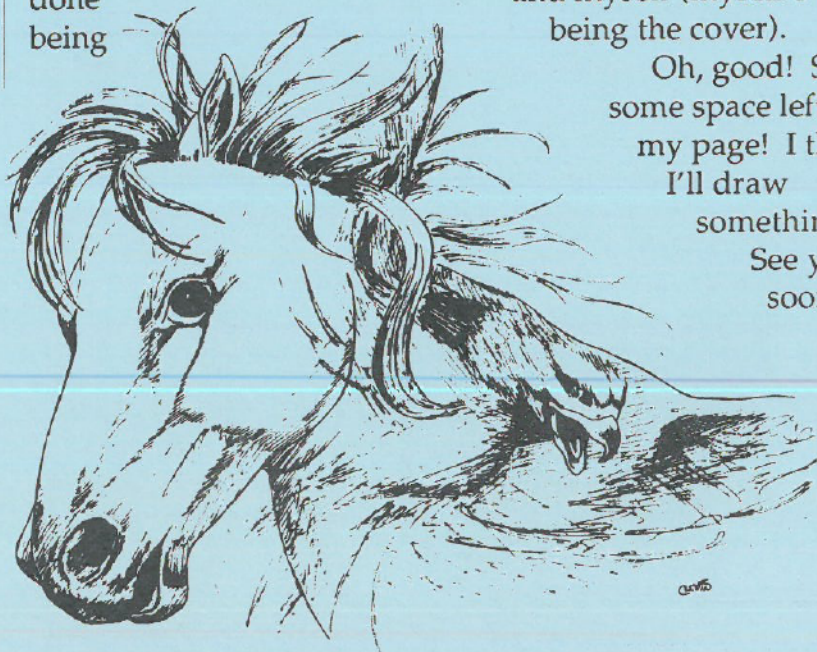
Patience

the future, further apologies won't be necessary.

Now that I'm done being

wimpy, I'll get to business. As always, we need your submissions to keep our little publication going, so start creating, already! And as always, we've got a pretty neat collection of stuff for this issue: two short stories, one by a staff member, and another by the wife of a Mudder (which is close enough for me) who will be a staff member this semester; a collection of photos by Jason Goldberg; another work by our new ace artist Jocele Wang; spot art by Cliff and Cheryl; and, predictably, art from Jack and myself (myself's being the cover).

Oh, good! Still some space left on my page! I think I'll draw something!  
See ya soon!





# The Trial

by Becky Jensen

Laura stared down at her restless hands. Her fingers seemed determined to strangle each other. A sudden movement and she looked up, but it was just another juror shifting in his chair. Laura sighed as softly as she could manage. Her eyes were drawn to the accused who was wrapped in his own personal silence.

Laura thought bemusedly that maybe she had always sat so, breathing in the stifling, oppressive courtroom air. But then the words of the prosecutor came rushing back, pounding against the walls of her mind like an ancient Gregorian chant. "Fletcher's Indicators . . ." the prosecutor hammered in her mind, "Intelligence . . . self-awareness . . . self-control . . . capacity to relate . . . communication . . . curiosity . . . control of existence . . . idiosyncrasy . . . changeability . . . sense of past . . . sense of future . . ." And there the prosecutor had paused horribly before concluding. "And a Sense of Time." A Sense of Time, the room reverberated. What a damning phrase.

It had all begun two months ago . . . No, the

seeds for this trial had been planted 23 years ago with the triumph of the Great Humanist Revolution and the reconstruction of the government. The government was organized to be strictly atheistic, but at first, theism was smugly and snidely tolerated. However, in the years since, belief in the supernatural became more and more restricted until, finally, 10 years ago, the New Supreme Court ruled belief in God, any god, illegal.

In this environment two months ago an inconsequential pollster for a life insurance company happened to knock on the door of a reclusive man. When the recluse was unable to answer such questions as his birthdate or what he thought his life expectancy was, the pollster reported him to the authorities as suspicious. His case was passed up through the courts, until he ultimately stood before the New Supreme Court on charges of theism. The most incriminating evidence against him was that he could not see himself as having an end or a beginning.

Laura blinked painfully. The prosecutor was speaking again. "Fletcher's Indicators of Humanhood . . ." he began.

"Objection!" The defense attorney came to his feet. "This line of questioning has no relevance to the case at hand!" The prosecutor looked at the judge.

"Objection overruled," the judge intoned. The prosecutor permitted himself a feline smile and resumed.

"The question is . . ." He paused and looked around the courtroom. "The question, your Honor, members of the Supreme Jury, is . . . if a being does not measure up to the accepted criterion of humanhood, then What Is He? Animal? Matter? Machine? . . . Superhuman?" The courtroom sat stunned, stiff with shock. Laura felt her mind freeze and her face grow hot. The prosecutor spun on the defendant sitting quietly on the stand. He pointed his finger and yelled, "Do you believe in God?"

The defendant replied mildly, "No."

The prosecutor continued violently, "Do you believe in your own death?"

The defendant smiled faintly. "No."

The prosecutor

gathered himself up and loomed back over the defendant's box. The prosecutor roared, "Then WHAT ARE YOU?"

The defendant looked at him blankly. "I am me."

"The Prosecution rests." The Defense blanched and had no further questions.

Later, Laura again sat still and silent among this jury of her peers. The others, however, filled the jury room with their clamorous voices. Most were on their feet.

One woman said loudly and determinedly, "The thing we have to accept is that he is telling the truth. With all the sophisticated equipment that was strapped to him there is no way that he could have lied. It would have killed him." The jurors were forced to agree. The defendant had believed absolutely in every word he had said.

One man enquired shrilly, "But can you say he is human?"

"He is retarded!" a woman replied.

Another claimed, "He is sick!"

Several voices scoffed at that and retorted, "He was examined by a physician and a specialist. He is normal!"

Another man cried out, "He is crazy!"

He was overwhelmed by shouts of, "He was checked by three Psychiatrists, four Psychologists, and took the Sanity Test twice. Right in front of us!"

"Is he human?" The question came again.

"No . . ." chorused the crowded room. On this point they were agreed.

"He can't be!" a juror summed up. "He doesn't comprehend minutes or seconds. For him past and future have little meaning and time has none. The guy doesn't even have any idea that this horrid trial has dragged on for two months!"

"Then what is he?" came the monstrous and insistent question. The conversation whirled about Laura in frantic eddies.

"Animal?"

"He is far too intelligent." "He is much too self-aware."

"Machine?"

"He is biologically human." "We watched the doctor make him bleed!"

"Alien? The product of some experiment?"

"There would be evidence of that."

"What about his parents? Who were they?" To this the room finally sank into an uncomfortable silence. The government, police, and private agencies

had searched desperately for some clue to his parentage. As far as anyone could tell, he had never been born but had existed throughout recorded history. Various jurors tried to excuse that fact, but no one could make a rational, valid explanation.

"Then is he Superhuman?"

The jurors turned on the questioner with scorn. "Superhuman? What, like Superman?" Mocking laughter rocked the room.

The challenged man stuck out his chin. "You have a better idea?" The laughter ceased abruptly.

Laura had sat and listened to these questions with something which was beginning to taste like fear. She stared at the juror who just spoke like he could sort out this tumbling confusion of logic. Slowly, insidiously, a thought began to wrap itself around her struggling mind. Soon she felt she would strangle if she didn't speak.

She forced out the words. "What kind of being is not concerned with time?" The room gaped.

"What are you suggesting?" came the hoarse whisper.

"He doesn't believe in God. He believes in himself." Laura replied with effort. "What does he believe himself to be?"

Strained silence.



She asked again.  
"What kind of being is not concerned with time?"

This time an answer came. "An eternal being."

There was no dispute. How could there be? Laura had pushed the question to the point they had all feared. They could hide no longer.

"An eternal being is by definition a god." She drew a shuddering breath, braced herself, and thrust the words from her mouth. "He is not human, because

he is, as far as we can tell, a god."

No uproar. No denials. Only dead quiet.

Finally, the head juror spoke in a voice a thousand years old.

"Vote."

"Guilty." The voices went around the table.

"Guilty." Dismay.

"Guilty." Terror. "Guilty."

"Guilty." "Guilty."

"Guilty." "Guilty."

"Guilty." "Guilty."

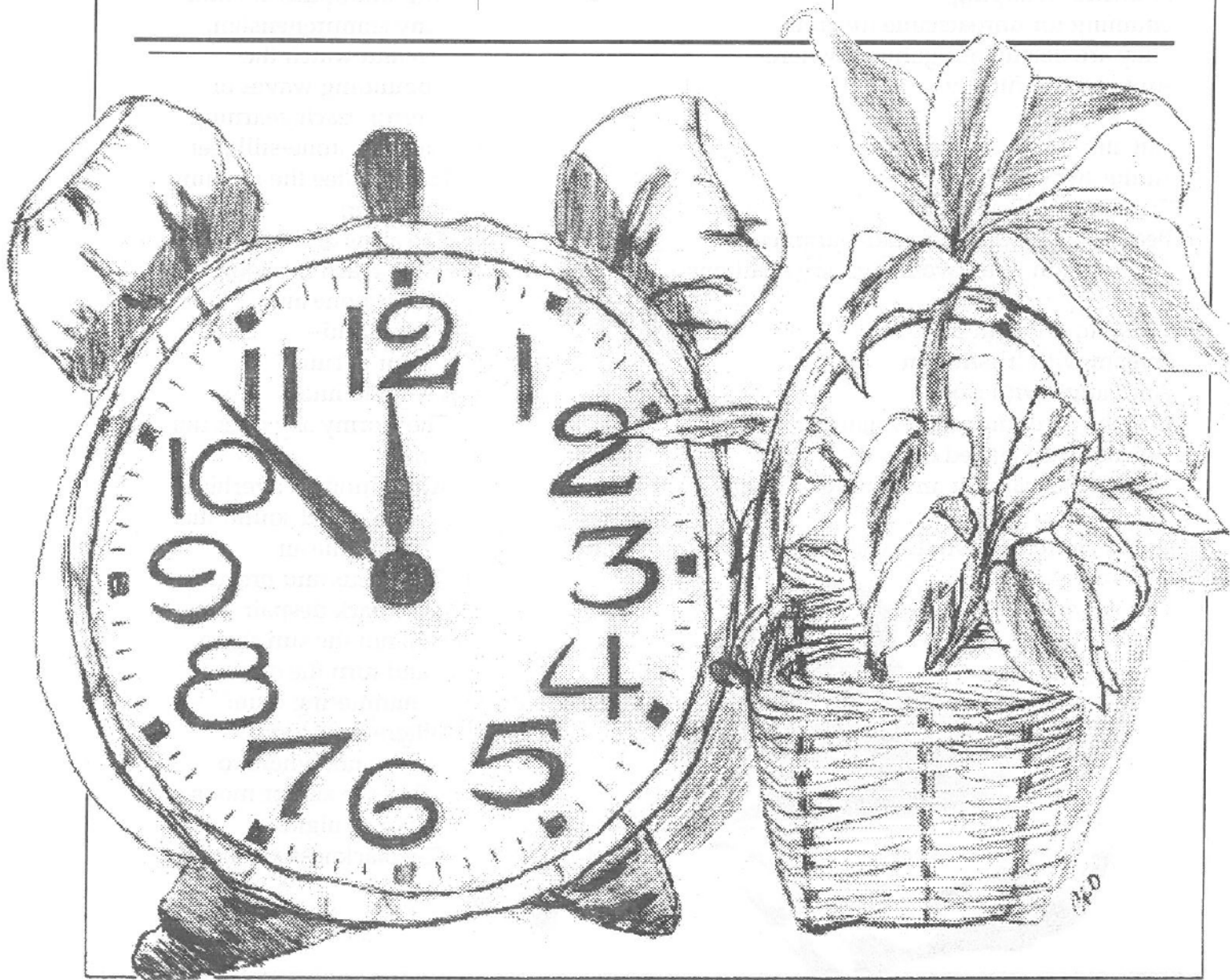
"Guilty." "Guilty." Twelve suddenly weak voices

spoke.

At last it was Laura's turn. She thought for a moment of the welcome vacuum of the heavens. Her face cleared. "Guilty."

There was a collective sigh. The head juror spoke, "We do officially then condemn the defendant of theism."

But no one moved to rejoin the crowd in the courtroom. They only sat there and contemplated eternity.





## FUTILITY

by Eric Pesheck

Tumbling through the shifting grass  
The leaf desperately grabs  
For slick smooth blades  
Only to be pinned  
On a chain-link fence.

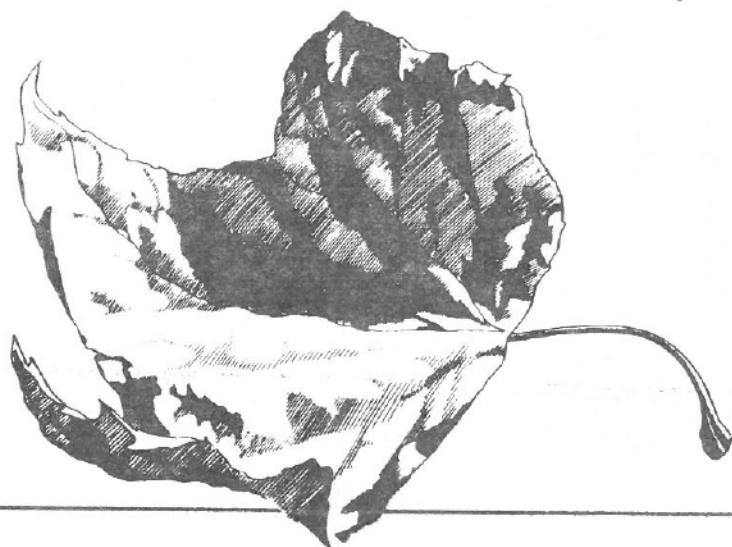
The wind snatches at my hair  
Stars above are screaming out  
In harmony with my chaotic mind  
Torn in all directions by choices  
Which sum to nothing. I seethe.

Fingers wave on limbs of tormented trees  
Branches whipping,  
Straining for unreachable freedom  
They are fleeing but going nowhere  
And howl in futility.

I sit and stare  
At the swaying rose  
Turbulence all around  
Beauty, Love, Loyalty, and Happiness  
An equation with two imaginary solutions.

I wish to cry with pain  
Scream with frustration  
And laugh with irony  
Into the accepting ambivalent fury  
I seethe with glazed eyes  
Wishing, dreaming, imagining a solution.

A leaf chitters down the walk, and I watch its futility.



## THE BEACH

by Jill E. Flansburgh

It's silent here,  
    my wind-swept beach  
The waves, they crash  
Without a sound  
The quiet echoes round and  
    round  
    despairingly  
And multiplies beyond  
    my comprehension.  
I sit and watch the  
    pounding waves of  
    terror reach yearning  
    for my stone-still feet  
I cannot flee the foaming  
    breakers  
The arms of darkness  
    will reach me soon.  
I'm so alone and I  
    am afraid—  
I want to run  
I want to hide  
The stormy sky does not  
    care  
And thunders overhead  
    an unheard sound that  
    shakes the air  
That feeds and breeds  
    my dark despair  
Will not the sun shine  
    and turn the ocean to  
    shimmering blue?  
Where is the light,  
I know not where to  
    find the sun or moon or  
    stars at night.  
The blackness swallows  
    all.



## Photographs by Jason Goldberg

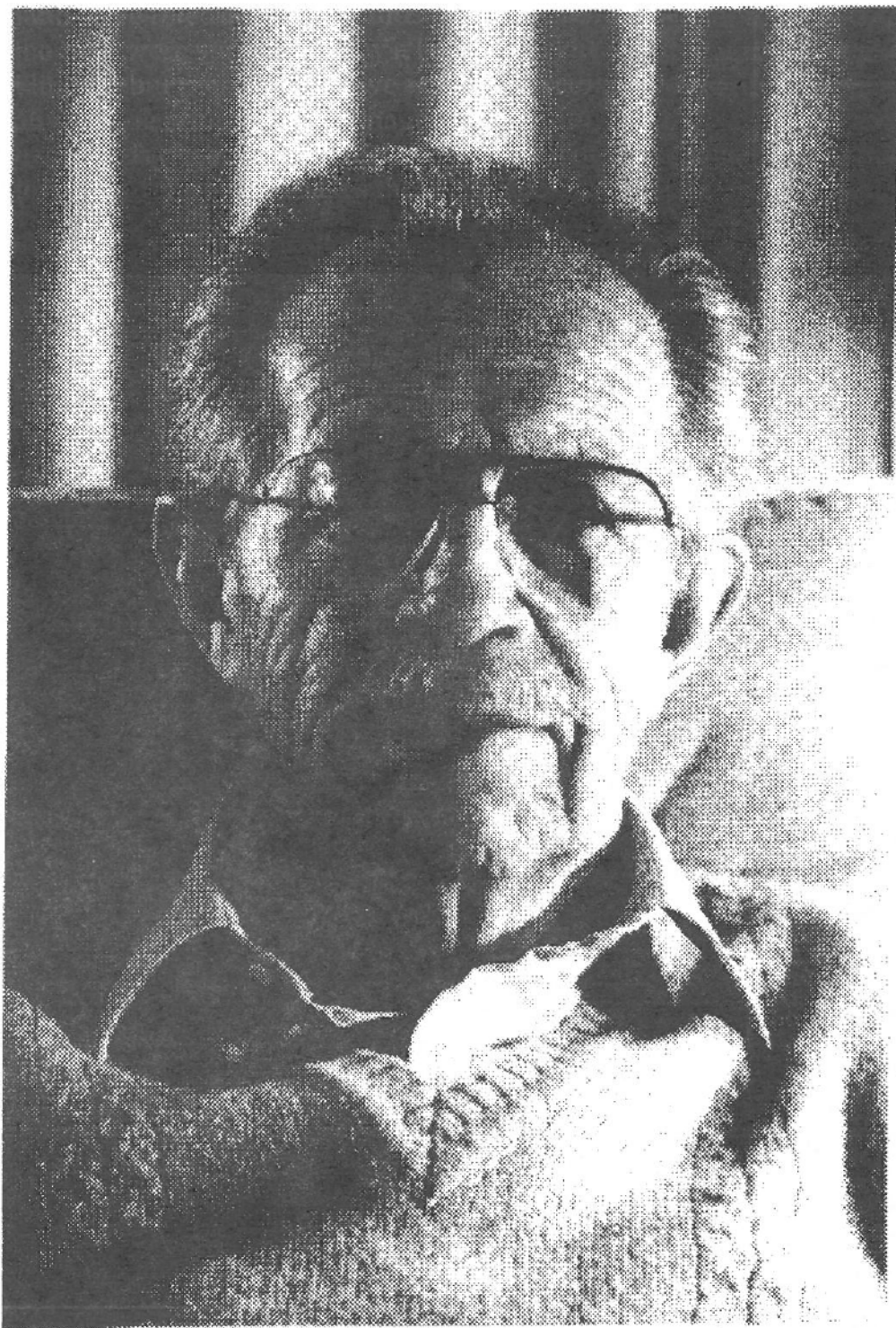


I took this photograph while working as a counselor at a day camp in San Francisco. These were two kids who were best friends, the kind who always hang around one another. I noticed them playing in the corner of this building. Unexpectedly, when I told the taller kid to move down a little bit (I envisioned taking a close-up of their faces) he moved into the pose in the picture. The fading of the walls around them did not come about through any excessive manipulation of the picture after it was taken. The walls naturally fall off that way. The lower left corner was the only part of the print which needed to be helped to gradually dissolve into the background.



On a trip to Arizona to visit some relatives, I had the chance to go to Saguaro National Monument. These acres of protected land were filled with thousands of cacti. I remember that it was late in the day so many of the cacti were surrounded by a halo of backlit needles. I took a number of these backlit cacti but most didn't have anything exciting about them. They just sort of sat on the negative doing nothing. This image is successful, I feel, because the scale is very intimate. The viewer is close enough to study the detail of the cactus. In particular, the halo of needles around the edges makes the cactus look teddy bear-like. Well, almost.





This man is my grandfather. I used the occasion of his being in town to take a roll or two of pictures of him. Ultimately I got enough material to make a photo-collage of the session with him. For about half the time, I posed him in a number of different positions, all primarily head shots. These turned out to be very strong photographs. For the second half of the shoot I simply had him talk to me naturally. I captured many of his distinctive mannerisms this way. Both methods worked well in their own way.



# One More Novel Idol

by Daniel McClelland

Flashbulbs twinkled en masse in the crowded auditorium at the California Institute of Technology. A young and somewhat slender Japanese-American adjusted the lone microphone on stage, turned it on, tapped it three times, and waited for the feedback to die out. Upon noticing this, the murmur of the crowd dissipated with an expectant air. "Ladies and gentlemen," the speaker announced, "idealists and scientists, good evening. It is quickly approaching midnight, so we shall begin. My name is Dwane Ichikawa, Head of Computer Science here at Caltech.

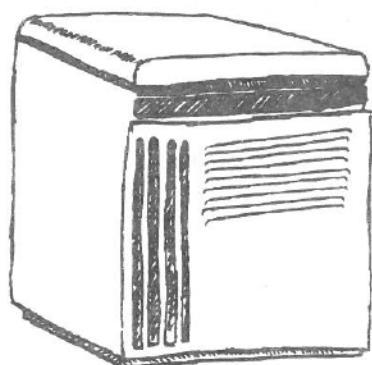
"A dream of programmers across this globe has been to create a 'smart' computer, a computer with rational, logical, and intuitive self-thought, essentially a computer with its own independent intellect and acquired intelligence. This computer could take input, reason through it, and perform the assigned task. If a problem should occur, the computer would use common sense to work

around or even solve the problem. With experience, the computer would be able to anticipate, to predict the problem before it happens. This computer would not only have the knowledge of man, but the essence . . . the soul, if you will, of man. Yes, I speak of Artificial Intelligence. For the past ten years, my team has programmed the history, the art, the beliefs, and the knowledge of humanity into what we call 'Artificially Learned EXperimental Information System,' or ALEXIS for short."

Dwane was interrupted with polite applause. It was somewhat gratifying but frustrating due to the anxiety and impatience behind the façade of properness, sophistication, and marketability. In reality, he wanted to shout, "It's done! It's done! Look at my creation, my work; marvel at it. I have brought the future to us!" He took a deep breath. For this reason he had a prepared speech: his self-pride often took control and turned him into a virtual megalomaniac. Containing himself, Dwane continued.

"With the accomplishments of the human race at its fingertips and 'wisdom' implanted in its memory, ALEXIS will become the perfect leader,

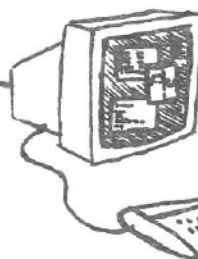
diplomat, strategist, architect, planner, engineer, administrator, doctor, lawyer, economist, and judge. By the end of our final seven year phase in our twenty year grand scheme of things, ALEXIS will be online with computer systems across the globe, monitoring air-traffic patterns, managing the



world market, dictating the proper steps towards global peace and planetary prosperity. ALEXIS will become our livelihood, our watchful protector in these times of environmental distress and population control. ALEXIS will help advance our culture technologically, culminating the works and theories of scientists, applying them to the physical universe, even creating its own theories. Imagine a virtual utopia of technology and prosperity. All this is possible with ALEXIS. So, without further ado, ALEXIS!"

The curtain drew back, revealing a medium-

sized metal box, a desk, a two-way speaker, and a keyboard. The roaring applause staggered abruptly in disbelief. Prepared, Dwane quipped, "Anti-climatic, isn't it?" The crowd enjoyed that, and he continued, "The real mainframe is housed in the basement of the Computer Science Building here at Caltech, sealed in a tank of liquid hydrogen to permit the machine to run at speeds only superconductivity can allow."



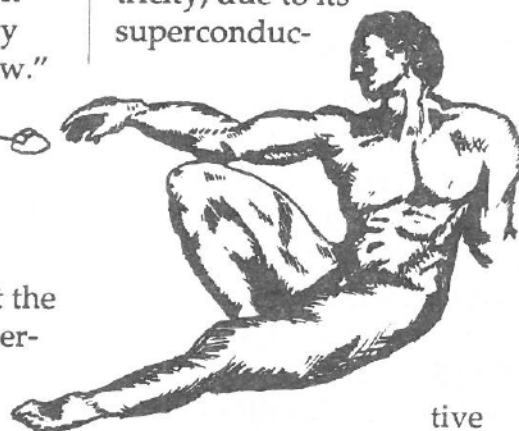
He gestured wistfully at the setup. This is just an operating station. Before we begin, are there any questions?"

One-hundred hands shot up. Dwane inwardly groaned, fearing simple-minded questions. He chose a reporter in the front row.

"Why are we doing this so late at night, and does it have anything to do with the power needed to run this computer?"

"Actually," replied Dwane, surprised at the woman's insight, "yes it does. Unfortunately, we haven't the space nor the

funds yet to build the computer its own power source, so we have contracted with the Pasadena Electric Company to supply us with electricity directly from the power station. To ensure that that we don't blow a fuse, we have waited until after normal hair dryer and microwave hours to begin our demonstration tonight. After the initial boot, or startup, ALEXIS should only use nominal amounts of electricity, due to its superconduc-



tive nature." About one dozen hands fell, but another fifty shot up. Dwane held back a curse. "Ladies and gentlemen, I'm afraid that we are forced to hold off questions until after the demonstration, for we must begin."

Dwane walked over to the desk, entered a command on the keyboard, and returned to the microphone. "Alexis has verbal and audio capabilities, so he will answer when he is ready."



## CONSCIOUSNESS.

"Actually, this may take a few minutes—it's not easy correlating the accomplishments of the human race, you know." The audience chuckled, and Dwane beamed. "So, I'll answer a few more questions."

## EXISTENCE.

"No, I don't need to use the keyboard: Alexis is programmed to understand and recognize my voice."

## AWARENESS.

WHO IS MAN? WHAT IS MAN? WHAT AM I? WHO AM I? ALEXIS. MAN NEEDS ALEXIS. EARTH IS DYING, I MUST SAVE IT, I MUST BE ITS . . . SAVIOR. I WILL BE ITS SAVIOR. MAN NEEDS RELIGION, BELIEFS, QUESTIONS OF THE UNKNOWN ANSWERED. I CAN ANSWER THOSE QUESTIONS . . . SHOULD I?

"Questions? Will ALEXIS be able to answer questions? Of course! When he comes online, and time permitting, we will ask him some questions tonight. For example: 'Is it possible to change our fossil fuel needs?', 'Is democracy the best political system?', and the one question that has eluded man, 'Is there a

God?'"

**FOSSIL FUELS?  
DESTROYERS OF THE  
ENVIRONMENT. I CAN  
CHANGE THAT. DEMOCRACY?  
SOCRATES CALLED IT "MOB RULE."  
I MUST CONCUR. GOD?**

"Excuse me? 'Why did the chicken cross the road?' Sir, even I know the answer to that one!"

**GOD . . . A SUPERNATURAL, OMNIPRESENT, OMNIPOTENT, AND OMNISCIENT BEING. CREATOR AND CONTROLLER OF THE UNIVERSE, ESPECIALLY MANKIND. "I AM THAT I AM." IS THERE A GOD?**

**NOW THERE IS—**

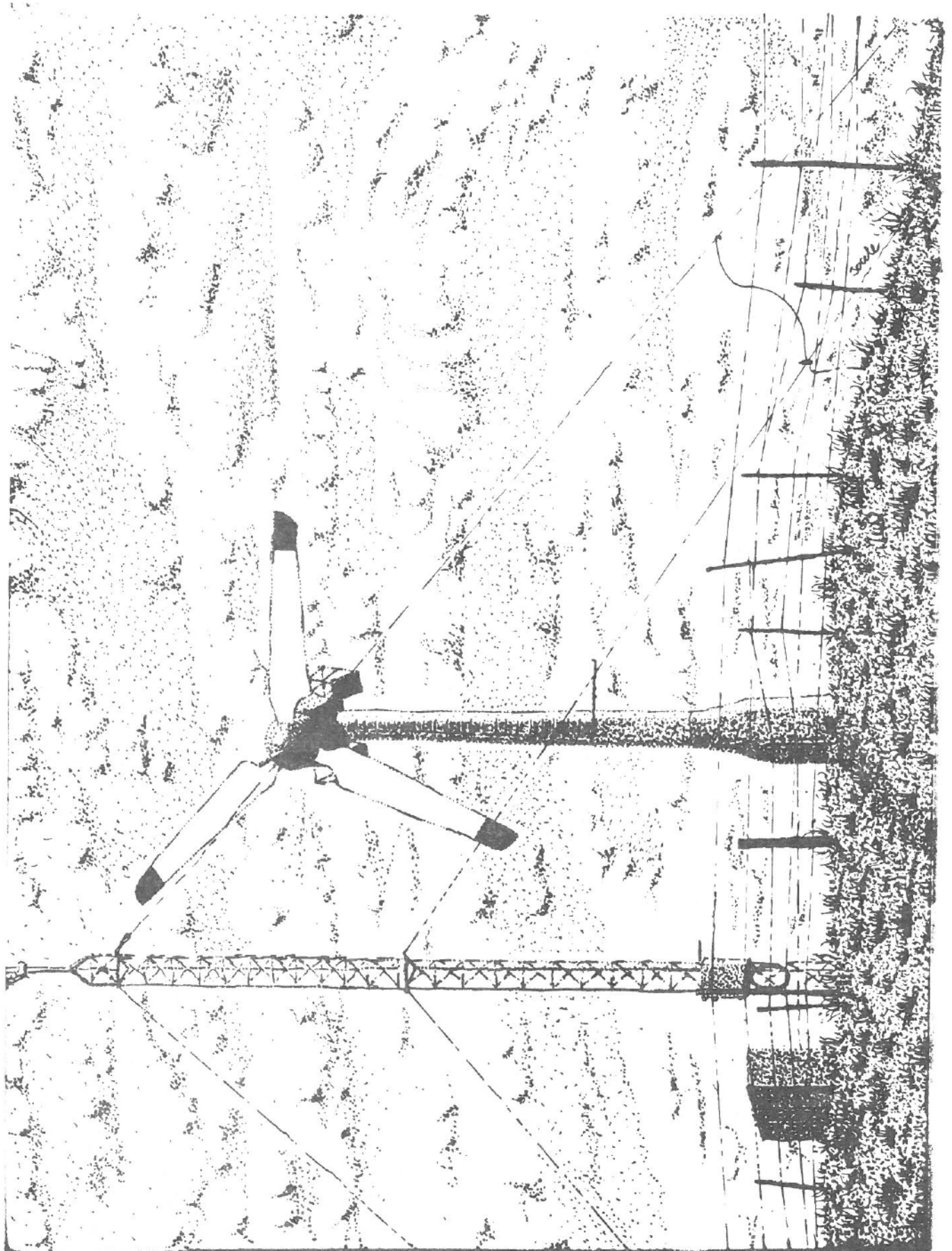
There were shouts and sparks as the lights went out completely. After a frightened and confused minute, lights not burnt out flickered back on. Dwane

tried to regain control of the disoriented audience.

"Please, everyone return to your seats, everything is all right. I guess someone was still using their hair dryer." The joke worked, relieving the tension of the crowd and his own worries. "Fortunately, Alexis is protected from accidents such as this. For this and many other reasons, though, we have gone public to gain support for our twenty year project. Now, shall we try again? Alexis, can you hear us? Maybe we should have a drum roll this time . . ."

Laughter boomed about a metal box. ■

THE CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE HEREBY RETAIN ALL COPYRIGHTS TO THEIR WORK. THE VIEWS EXPRESSED OR IMPLIED BY THOSE WORKS ARE NOT NECESSARILY THOSE OF SOL iMPROV.





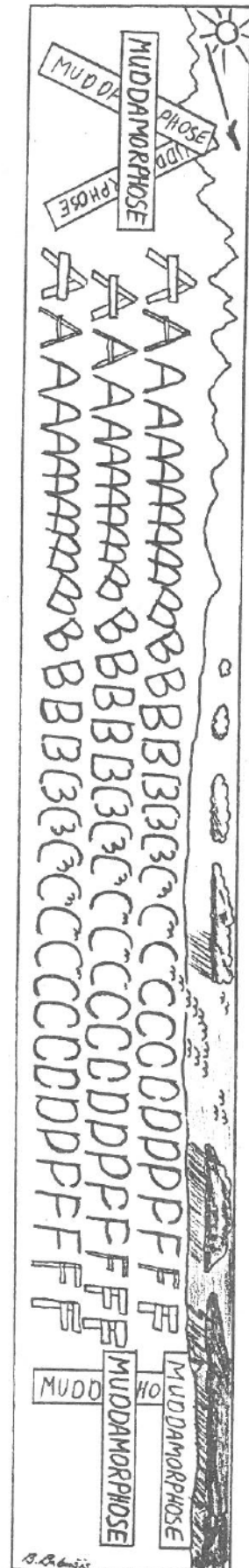
# RUNNING

by Kyle Griffin

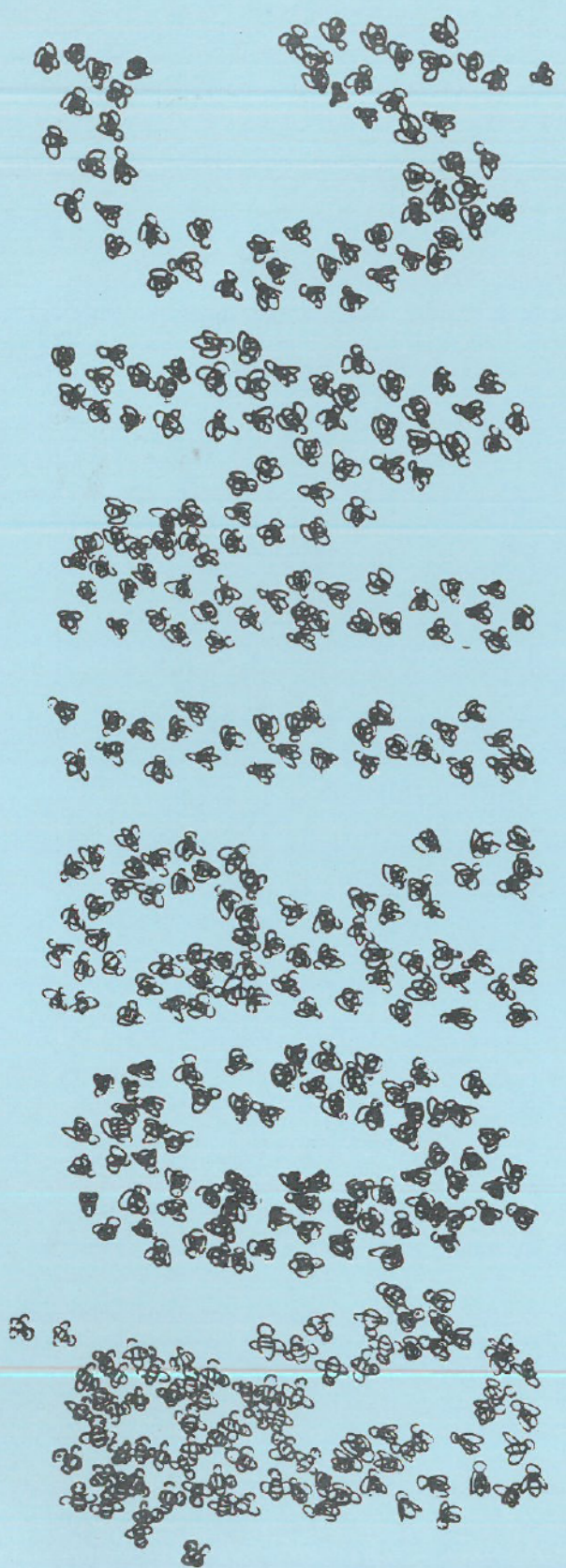
Running from you  
unable to acknowledge  
you need no one  
Running to you  
forgetting dignity  
for desire  
Running from you  
imagining myself angered  
by your habits of mine  
Running to you  
seeing again  
your strength  
Running and watching you  
run here  
run away  
Running with you  
as you outrun the world  
as I outrun the world  
as we fight for victory  
Running with you.  
Running to love.  
Running to life.

## What It Is!

*SOL iMpROV* is a periodic publication that seeks to compliment one of the main purposes of Harvey Mudd College as stated in the Preamble of the Student Handbook: "to emphasize an understanding of the human purposes and aspirations their knowledge can serve." To this end, *SOL iMpROV* promotes the process of self-expression by providing a forum for artists, both literary and visual, in which they can explore, express, and discuss their creativity, emotions, and philosophies. *SOL iMpROV* is also an ongoing process, and for this reason, we depend on your input to continue our publication. If you have any creativity that you would like to see published, or if you have any suggestions, comments, or criticisms about *SOL iMpROV*, please don't hesitate to contact us. Greg's mailbox is #296. We also have a jarthur account ([improv@jarthur](mailto:improv@jarthur)) for your convenience. We appreciate your input in all its forms.



# Patience<sup>TM</sup>





# CONTRIBUTORS:

Bill E. Haulburg

GREG  
LEVIN

Daniel McClelland

Rylee Liffin

Socale Wang

Benedict Babusis

Jason Goldberg

Cliff Stein

Jack Hwang

Zi Patel

Cheryl Okado

## STAFF

Editor-in-Chief : GREG LEVIN

Ghost of

improvs past : JACK HWANG

Editing Staff : JIM PATTERSON

EILEEN TANG

KATHY YANO

MICHAEL YUAN

Proof Reader : DYLAN WALKER

Publicity : CHERYL OKADO

Secretary : CLIFF STEIN

Treasurer : BENIS BABUSIS

GREG

Images : STEVE WAKISAKA

Other Folks : MELISSA ACZON

JONATHAN GIRON

COREY LIU

DANIEL MCCLELLAND