

STEPHEN NAGY

Minglings

Demetrius reels. His muscles ripple as he reels. The Legion has no more water; it is eight days to another oasis. Sand (eternal sand). Pain is on his rugged face as beads of sweat roll carefully down his temples. Rome's battered eastern legion withstands the barbarians, but their positions are weakening. If only there were boulders. He could use some boulders . . . to throw. It is exactly 1:34 in the afternoon and the Libyan Desert is taking its toll (the sun beating down unmercifully). By sheer discipline they hold against the furious onslaught, but now their numbers dwindle. And yet Demetrius inspires his troops to join shields and reform into protective phalanxes. Blood drips from the tips of their lances. This will be the final attack. There are too many faceless barbarians. Demetrius sees the marker and sinks to his knees. His armor clanks manfully. His handsome blue eyes squint upward into the blue sky and follow a contrail moving slowly toward the horizon. It is nearly over; they cannot last forever. Octavian had promised a relief legion. If the gods will it, they will arrive in time. A din . . . distant, and getting louder. The Emperor's forces!? He isn't sure wha-- dune buggy erupts over a hill and charges at them, its tires spraying sand high into the air. The driver screams obscenities as one of his riders throws a half empty can at Demetrius. Blatz spatters on his back. The fat director smacks the cameraman on the head with his usual Neapolitan violence. Spinning in a taut Apache-like circle, the buggy guns off ferociously towards Flagstaff.

To Huntington, W. Va.

The city is an ember in the mirror,
delegated to a committee of memories,
but its smell still hides in my car.
Laminations of civilization peel off inside
like a migrant skinning an onion.
This is an ultimate country, one we
passed in the normal time,
where women's love is heightened in cafes,
and gaunt hillbillies smelling of the foundry
stand at street corners, smoking nervously.