

And always on my right flank was the harpist,  
 Young, but best damn driver in the Corps.  
 A tank-jock's normally a tougher cut  
 Than he who played as if retained for life  
 With Menelaus praising his sweet hands--  
 Those proven hands that bullied steel and heat,  
 Commanding his big thunderbitch with verve.

Deployed in battle line, my bulky fleet  
 Of blunt and roaring vessels sailing sand  
 Was on alert. Our thermal sights blipped full.  
 Identified as enemy, I still  
 Begged instruments for every shred of knowing.  
 My guns made pale Lord Zeus's lightning bolts,  
 Made trash of other tanks. Our radios  
 Had words. The column was approaching fast.

I gave the order to destroy the targets.  
 Incredible the way our rounds homed toward  
 Their marks, made tracks and turrets flash and roar.  
 Grey-eyed Athena gasped, her aegis high  
 Above the rubble, sending us a hawk,  
 A grey-backed raptor screeching victory.  
 Her cloud expanded slower than our eyes.  
 My crew racked up their scores like arcade games.

In twenty minutes, wounded men arrived.  
 Elation dwindled in a grinding pall;  
 We watched as one man fumbled on his way  
 As if to hide a pistol in his sleeve.  
 On closer look, he held his severed arm  
 And died beside my tank as others groaned.  
 Two more made wine-dark seas with their own blood.  
 Iraqi armored troops surrendering.

Back on patrol at dawn, that goddess glowed;  
 Homeric rosy fingers earned their poems.  
 The crews were sobered, combat had its bite.  
 Then animated sights required decisions.  
 The shapes we read were not exact enough  
 To leave no doubt. But if we held off long  
 We'd be within their range. Commanders all  
 Have grappled that chimera in their craws.

(cont.)

N.

Odyssey

"Sweet Jesus, Cap'n