

# The Prairie Light Review

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Volume 10  
Number 2 *timepeace*

Article 50

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Spring 5-1-1991

## Zeroes

Richard Zabransky  
*College of DuPage*

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### Recommended Citation

Zabransky, Richard (1991) "Zeroes," *The Prairie Light Review*: Vol. 10 : No. 2 , Article 50.  
Available at: <https://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol10/iss2/50>

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## ZEROES

*Richard Zabransky*

They came out of the east, you said,  
where the clouds turnip on the horizon  
and the sun is a welder's flare.

At first you thought it was the hangover  
from trying to forget the wahini,  
or a formation too geometric for gulls.

Then you heard the sound  
of grasshoppers caught in a paper bag,  
the mantra of an empire.

With a ladder, you could have  
climbed to see your reflection  
on the shadowless faces of the boys,  
but, instead, the world turned upside down  
as your head rotated back  
in the afterdraft of their wake.

You told me about them  
the night of the draft lottery,  
the night they picked us for Vietnam;

funny, I thought,  
how much zeroes mean,  
the kind that hold count in a line of figures,  
or the kind buried in the pupils  
of eyes that are never seen  
yet which foreshadow our lifetimes.

From where you stood,  
you could see the smoke from Pearl  
blossoming like a hybrid  
of cuttlefish and midnight.  
You mashed out your Lucky  
and headed for base.

Today, we invaded Panama  
and received accounts of acceptable losses.  
*Deemed Operation Just Cause*  
by Rather, Brokaw, and Jennings,  
we watched together,  
zapping channels.

A young marine threw the same grenade  
three times —  
you said he'd have a great fastball,  
and I imagined a perfect game,  
another string of zeroes  
placed in the record books.