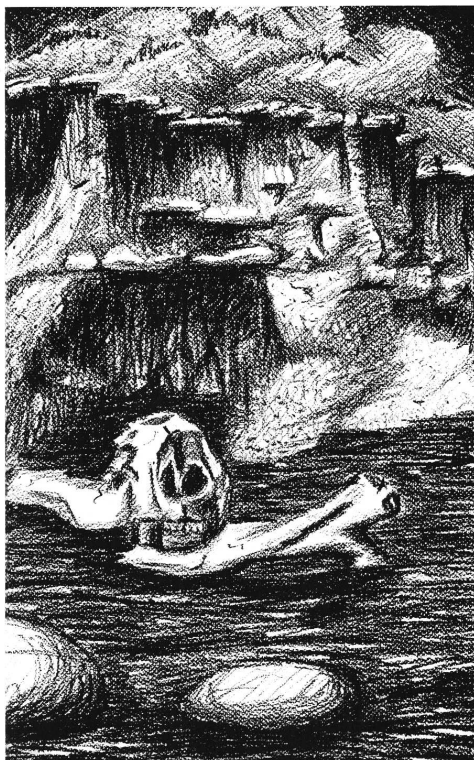


Please study the picture and poem “Innocent Assassins,” below. Then, choose one of the project options listed at the end of the poem.



Innocent Assassins

Once in the sun-fierce badlands of the west
in that strange country of volcanic ash and cones,
runneled by rains, cut into purgatorial shapes,
where nothing grows, no seeds spring, no beast moves,
we found a sabertooth, most ancient cat,
far down in all those cellars of dead time.
What was it made the mystery there? We dug
until the full length of the striking saber showed
beautiful as Toledo steel, the fine serrations still
present along the blade, a masterpiece of murderous art conceived
by those same forces that heaved mountains up
from the flat bottoms of Cretaceous seas.

Attentive in a little silent group we squatted there.
This was no ordinary death, though forty million years
lay between us and that most gaping snarl.
Deep-driven to the root a fractured scapula
hung on the mighty saver undetached; two beasts
had died in mortal combat, for the bone
had never been released; there was no chance
this cat had ever used it fangs again or eaten—
died there, in short, though others of its kind
grew larger, larger, suddenly were gone
while the great darkness went about its task,
mountains thrust up, mountains worn down,
till this lost battle was exposed to eyes
the stalking sabertooths had never seen.

