By PAUL BURKA

Sing me, Muse, and through me tell the story of that man skilled in all ways of contending, the wanderer, harried for years on end, after he plundered the stronghold on the proud heights of Troy.

Homer: The Odyssey

It was still slightly unreal, even at that hour of the night. All you could remember was a pretty girl and a lot of people standing around and a voice saying something about aumble and a Rice recovery...

Four floors seemed like a lot to climb, too, so you didn't take it all at once. Room 231 looked like an attractive place to stop: it was halfway, and a nice guy lived there, and maybe you could talk to him about it.

So you walked in the door, full of a forgotten feeling called hope, and there, back from Baton Rouge, was Walter McReynolds, lying in bed, ending the greatest night of his life by reading the Odyssey. And it seemed ironic that on the very night when he had himself reached his proudest heights, he had returned three millennia into history to read of the analogical deeds of an ancient predecessor.

Seldom if ever has a Rice team entered a game as such a prohibitive underdog. It wasn't so much the odds—LSU was a 15 point favorite—but the meaning behind the betting line. LSU, doubtless the nation's finest defensive team, has only given up as many as 15 points in a game once since 1958. Only last year, as any loyal Owl fan can tell you, it was Rice who killed the national championship ambitions of the Tigers, 16-5.

And thus it was that the 15 point odds took on even greater significance. For the Owls, it wasn't to be a question of winning or losing; it was merely a question whether or not LSU could score enough. A few, and very few, conceded that the game might be reasonably close. Nowhere was it admitted that Rice might win. The Owls weren't given a chance.

You remembered your ninth grade year, back in junior high in Calvelston, when you watched the seventh graders working out. "Paul," said the man with a whistle around his neck, "I've got a boy here who's going to be an all-American some day."

You remembered your senior year in high school, when he replaced a returning letterman quarterback to start every game as a sophomore. And you remember that voice again, talking about a pass out in the flat, and the numbers decreasing by fives—25, 20, 15, 10. 5—until at last the magic word came: touchdown.

The most amazing feature of the game was not McReynolds' remarkable composure, or the great catches of the Rice ends, or the magnificent play by the Rice line, but the fact that sophomores came through as they did. The ends, predictably did their job; they turned LSU's bread-and-butter power sweeps inside. But the inexperienced tackles were equally valiant. Against the finest line in the South, they held their own time after time. In the middle of the line the Owls were solid; in the backfield they proved they could move the ball.

The problems the Owls still face are far less grave today than they were a week ago. The defensive line could pass no rougher test, but the offensive blocking wasn't as sharp. We firmly believe that no team which relies primarily on passing can win in this conference, and point to SMU with Meredith, and Baylor with Stanley and Ply as recent examples. However, no team gives ground more grudgingly or less often than LSU, and as the Owl linemen and backs develop, a potent ground attack should follow.

The Owl kicking game left a great deal to be desired. The missed extra point and the blocked field goal were four precious points that should have been cashed. And a short opening kickoff almost gave LSU a six-point chip. The punting, while better than LSU's, still fell the effect of too many 30-yarders. Texas will probably average better than forty yards per kick this year, and the Owls can't afford to give away ten yards per exchange. Ten yards can be a long, long distance. Ask LSU.

And you kept thinking, as you slowly returned to reality, are they real? Was it a fluke? But you knew that in Baton Rouge it couldn't be a fluke, and yet you wondered if they could do it against Penn St. And you dropped off to sleep happily, very happily, secure in the knowledge that at the other end of Highway 290 someone in Austin wasn't sleeping well at all. And you knew that if the Penn State game turned out the way you thought it could, you could point a seismograph toward Austin next Saturday night and watch the needle jump.