

THE VAGABOND

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THE VAGABOND



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Southwestern Foundation and ASO through Ways and Means.

We are very thankful for their continued support.

Editor's Note

Writing this final editor's note is bittersweet. This is the last Vagabond that I edit before the reigns are handed off to another talented editor. I look back at these last three years and I am overwhelmed. It has been a wild ride, filled with a lot of joy, pride, love, wonder but also headaches, frustrations, disillusionment and if I had a chance to do it all again—I absolutely would. To the amazement at the talented work of my fellow classmates to the frustration and disappointment in dealing with the financial and administrative aspect of publishing, I know I will miss it all. Maybe not so much with the frustrating parts.

When I first took the role as an editor, I came in determined to change the magazine, now as I'm leaving, I decided to do the same. It might seem minor, but you might have noticed the pages are bigger. I made this change so that we can better display art and the poetry of our writers. In the past we had to make alterations to form but now we can publish poems in the exact way the writer intended. I am confident that the editors after me will also have the same mentality of improving the magazine.

This semester we are publishing 73 submissions. We have 18 prose pieces, 31 poems, 3 plays and 21 art pieces. That is amazing. It is always an honor to read and witness everyone's work and its humbling that all these writers and artists trust us with their works. I can't wait to see what else they might put out in the future.

I would like to end this editor's note thanking the writers and artists that have trusted us throughout the years with their work. I would also like to thank the Other Writers Guild and the members for their hard work in making this magazine happen every semester. Thank you and goodbye.

Jose Zuniga

The Vagabond editorial staff would like to thank the following people and organizations for their support of the publication of our club's literary magazine:

Professor Heather Eudy. She has helped and motivated past and present club members and officers to publish the magazine. She has been one of the biggest advocates of The Vagabond from dealing with issues outside of the club's control to reaching out to other English faculty to encourage students to submit their work to the Vagabond.

Dean of the School of Language and Literature, Antonio Alarcon. He has been a big supporter of the publication of the magazine. He is always looking for ways to help the club and the Vagabond whenever we encounter any issues.

The Southwestern College foundation. They have funded the past three Vagabond issues as well as this current one. With their help we have been able to get more copies in more students' hands and thus get the voices and stories of our writers to more people.

Associated Student Organization (ASO). The ASO has had a hand in funding almost every publication of the Vagabond since its inception. It is reassuring to see that an organization run by students sees the value in a platform that is for the students by the students.

We are grateful for everyone mentioned as well as many other's support and generosity. It really shows that our school cares about encouraging and nurturing the creativity and strong voices of the students from our school.

Thank you.

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AB INTRA

Through the tempest, I found beauty,/believing in rainbows after storms,

Lea Cadena

When I was a baby/it wrapped its gnarled green fingers around my lungs

G.W. Rash

Though my will cannot be broken, surely it cannot be sustained.

Michael Kamierowski

It was the end of the world, but they are still here.

Jesus Martinez

Twenty years and he was finally ready. He didn't want forgiveness; he didn't deserve it.

Noah Mayo

My outstretched hand waited patiently/For yours to intertwine with mine.

Suhmuntu

I had rebelled against God, against my victims and against their community. In addition, I had rebelled against my family, my community and against myself.

Arnold Brown

but I see truth in golden streams—/a world made whole, a heart set free,

Jesus Martinez

That indescribable feeling and pull appeared once more. Whatever complicated feelings she has for her old friend are swiftly pushed down.

Mariana Moya

Or beyond the stars that paint the night sky/My heart will hold your burning flame

Connor Shwartz

My Desire, talking to you is like watching a rainbow, wonderful and sweet, and all wrapped up in sunshine.

Alex Zapien

My day begins with thoughts of you and what you are doing.

Sean Scanlan

Like a living tomb I carry with me./The darkness is complete and I forget.

David Sharp

Living for others, is a life earned.

Alex Zapien

Ill be dead in 70 years, and I'll be a worthless corpse, forgotten and no longer with the people who gave a shit about me...

Essa Thabet

A thought sits on my tongue,/waiting to be shaped into sound./But they choose another voice

Jesus Martinez

The world is not good, nor is it bad. It is neither of those things. Neither are people. The world is not concerned. The world is thoughtless, thoughtless as the acts of authentic mind.

Aaron King

MY mind is captivating, for what I think of myself, I shall become. I AM WONDERFULLY MADE

Robert Spann

But what am I to do, I can only wish to make up down, right wrong and wrong right,/make what is easy hard and what is hard easy and maybe one day reverse this world

Jose Zuniga

This rancid, abrasive cocktail/that blisters and burns and bakes the bodies/of oceans and flesh, no permission double vision.

Chloe Saldana

He realized in that moment that he needed Alex more than Alex needed him. But the moment he admits that, he admits he doesn't have any control and never has.

Anthony Garcia

I saw not my reflection nor my truth./Buried under lies, emerged a stranger I knew well.

Michael Kazmierowski

Prison is an educational forum, if incarcerated individuals decide it to be so.

Arnold Brown

I am the one who saw that it was the whispers of Satan that beguiled you like he beguiled your parents.

R.A.S. de Ramavis

Time slips by, goes by,/And time can pass you by,

Michael Kazmierowski

If a man finds an oasis by maintaining hope while stranded in the desert, is he yet a fool?

J Asimovic

I was/hung from tree for all to see./Before there was George Floyd

Arnold Brown

home is the graffiti-ed bridge by Pepper Park, soul twins trekked side quests skipping rocks n' boomeranged stingrays back safely to their sea, where we'd realize sonder held no bounds.

Alexis Ramos

"Lies" are more powerful than "truth", for truth represents a static being where lies represent dynamic becoming.

Aaron King

The raindrops on my skin, a lethal dose/Absorb
enough and then it's you who'll drown.

Suhmuntu

A fallen leaf blown

Michael Kazmierowski

I want peace but I'm prepared to go to war

R.A.S. de Ramavis

For it knew then that death,/would have been the only
wish of his/to have ever come true.

Abel Escobedo

Savoring the scent of her father and the sweetness of
her mother's kisses, the young girl slowly brought herself
to let go of the two most important and only people in her
world.

Suhmuntu

That's the truth of living in a world so uncertain/No-
body knows what's behind the red curtain

Connor Shwartz

Shocked by the nightmare that felt so near./But the
iron walls still held me tight,

Raymond Chen

One might view it as the soul! A remnant from the crea-
tion of the current universe within each of us," he laughed
wildly, "the afterbirth of God!"

G.W. Rash

However when I see you, you possess a wilderness,/A
wilderness of happiness while I am nothingness.

Suhmuntu

I love my mom, and I can pretend she loves me, just for
another night more.

Anthony Garcia

I loved hearing you sing. You've got such a beautiful
voice. Now, you're as quiet as a church mouse just sitting in
here, staring off.

Steven Petersen

None are the same,/As that lonely dirt road,/Down
the way with no name.

Michael Kazmierowski

I was either shackled around my waist with a belly chain
and handcuffs, cuffed to the person next to me, or part of
a chained group of 10 people.

Arnold Brown

But maybe it's time to forget about the grave and better
yet grab an urn.

Jose Zuniga

Ignorance fuels pervasive racist views

J Asimovic

There was a peacefulness in the atmosphere, making
this planet even more beautiful than when I first arrived.

Suhmuntu

the world is divided into two types of individuals—/
Teachers and Learners./And yet you appear to be neither

G.W. Rash

The Guardians already had my meal ready and had their
armor on as well. My destiny awaits...

Alex Zapiens

Sometimes it feels like time is my only friend./And
dreams are where I go to escape,

Alex Zapien

like an old photo album of answers/collecting dust and
water damage

G.W. Rash

Eventually conceding to the presence, he offered her
his lasting words, “Every end begins.”

Michael Kazmierowski

the water filled with bodies/that no one came to count.

Jesus Martinez

Her closet was the only evidence someone lived in this
room, that it wasn't some picture on a realtor's website. Five
neatly stacked plastic boxes held her life, except for some-
thing hidden behind all of them.

Dana Villafana

Seasons of You

Lea Cadena

I watched you change like seasons.
As the leaves turned from green to orange, so did you.
Your warmth grew colder, summoning rain,
stirring thunderstorms—
yet between them, striking rays of light.
A dual nature of storm and shine.
I once believed I was good at reading the weather,
but sometimes, I couldn't predict
what was to come ahead of me.
It was constantly changing,
hard to foresee.
I stood beneath your sky, unsure—
was I waiting for sunshine
or bracing for rain?
I studied your patterns,
but in doing so, I forgot my own.
I did what I loved most—
watching, waiting.
Yet, I remained the same.
Why?
I thought abundance meant I was nourished.
In time, I realized—
too much water can drown fragile roots,
that even the strongest leaves can fall.
Still, I stayed.
Through the tempest, I found beauty,
believing in rainbows after storms,
hoping for warmth in the downpour.
But time taught me something else.
Too much water doesn't nourish—

it overwhelms.
My pot overflowed,
my leaves withered,
my roots, once eager to sprout,
began to decay.
Only on rare days
did a stray beam of sunshine appear.
And yet, I still reached for the sun,
drank what I thought was water,
convinced that, someday, I would bloom.
Maybe one day, the clouds will part,
and the warmth I seek
will no longer be fleeting.
Maybe then,
I will finally bloom.

The Stink!

G.W. Rash

... permeates the air –
from the shore,
it reaches out to the city limits
so that no one can forget
the way things are

... gets worse each day –
it was once so intense
that I actually imagined
I could see the stink lines
emanating from the browned ocean water

... isn't there –
the fisherman cast their lines
into empty, diseased waves
hoping for a bite
because it is what they are owed

... was always there
even when it wasn't,
whispering lies into neighbor's ears
and laundering cash
in what should have been honest businesses –

It was the streets of London during the Plague,
and what used to be Chernobyl,
and I can only imagine it was everything
when everything was the size of a grapefruit
just after time began

* * *

Sulfur, feces, fermentation, and rot

A healthy dose of death
wakes you up just fine
when you've never done anything before

* * *

When I was a baby
it wrapped its gnarled green fingers around my lungs
and, opening its rotten tooth, asked
“Got a light?”

I recovered in time but,
at age fourteen,
it caught me again
and I still cough in the mornings



Frankenstein

Alexis Ramos

Acrylic on Canvas

Conversations with God.

Michael Kazmierowski

Alone?

Are these conversations with God or rantings of a disturbed and unhinged mind? Do you hear me, or am I talking to myself?

Softly. Walk softly and be sure of your steps.

I thought I was alone. Abandoned to madness.

You are never alone, unless you choose to be. And even then, you are loved.

Love doesn't ease my pain or still my fears. Why must I guess at my future? Why can't you assure me of things to come? Then perhaps I could accept the present and not dwell in the past. Why must I find solace in things done that can't be changed?

It is the cost of wisdom. Stop contesting my love. Stop challenging your fate and accept your purpose.

Purpose? Fate? Is it all so decided for me? Then why is wisdom necessary?

It is not for you alone. Your destiny and path are shared. Just as you learn from others, they will look to you for guidance. This is my love of you and all things. Stumble and fall forward and stop looking back. You are never alone.

Huh?

What is a gift without guidance? Is it a curse? Is one expected to flounder about arms flapping; gasping for air like a drowning man? Am I to be grateful for amazing strength that I cannot use?

Find balance and peace and all shall be revealed.

How can I find balance when the ground beneath my feet saps me of my strength and my surroundings shield me from the light?

The light is within you and more than the bars that bind you. Trust in what you know to be true and awaken the energy outside of yourself. Then you will be returned to equal parts of what you are and released of your commitments. Death of what you remember is so close at hand. Seek out with your thoughts and mind and find yourself new.

Is it that easy that I need no further instruction? Is that wisdom truly inside me?

Overcome your fear and you will see the truth.

Fear of what? Fear of self? Fear of potential? Fear of God?

Fear none of those and fear nothing else and you will be awakened.

Faith?

What more must I lose?

Do you have faith in me?

Yes, that is all I have faith in. You lord. Everything else you have taken.

If I am God, am I not everything? Is not everything my creation?

Yes, you are the creator of everything, and you exist in all things.

So, your faith in me is everything. You have not lost anything. Through your faith you have been given more than you had. You have been given everything you have ever lost, and infinitely more. What you see is not what is true. It is in your faith in me, your love of my creation, that you have inherited all that I am. The past, present, the beginning, the end, life and death, all of the world and all of my creations are yours. You have lost nothing but have been given everything.

Faith in you is a special and lonely space. It is beautiful.

Doubt?

It is times like these. Times that I am consumed with feelings of betrayal, abandon and fear. Times when I feel loneliness that I can't begin to describe. When I am rudderless, without compass or keel. Afloat in an unknown ocean. When love and trust and faith in God are empty gestures. I search through a fog of doubt in every direction for something to hold on to. My mind screams out. I pray for reassurance. That all my pains, all my doubts, all my fears have not been simply the beginning of more impossible strug-

gles. I beg for the end of loss.

Though my will cannot be broken, surely it cannot be sustained. Though my strength is enduring, surely the end must be near. Through the veil my lord appears and says:

You must not falter in your steps. If you fall you must rise to your feet.

I can't! I've been knocked down, kicked, punched, run over, humiliated and left for dead. I have crawled, scratched, clawed, scraped and stood up again and again and again. Always alone. Always to see the light of promise and relief so close and torn from my grasp.

It is that unbreakable strength that you have inherited from me, my son. The strength I need you to share with those who believe that all is lost, that hope is gone.

You mock me, Lord. You know I will not lay down and accept death like my brother. You were so easy on him. He had your mercy and wisdom. You laugh at my struggles; force my pain.

Never do I want you hurt. Your brother's life was filled with his own struggles. Some far worse than yours. I did not bless you with the arrogance to assume my intentions. You are the test I put to my creation. I must know they can sustain what is to come.

I am lost but I have learned obedience. I have never succumbed to my tortures. I beg for respite Lord.

Your respite will come only when you have filled the hearts of my creation with hope. There will be no death, no mercy, no end to your struggle until then. That is a special love reserved for you. I have created you strong and wise beyond your years. Made you able for this purpose. You will not fail me.

Thank you, Lord. Without your strength and wisdom, I

would not endure. I know all that you have created is good and true. I go forward in spite and in your cause.

God?

If God is real then why?

If God is good then why?

If God is bad then why?

If God is great then why?

If God is all knowing then why?

If God is everything then why?

If God is questioned then God is denied!



Anime Girl #1

Raymond Chen

Color Drawing

The World Ends in Silent Loneliness

Jesus Martinez

It was the end of the world when the lights went out, when the streets hummed with a silence louder than bombs, when the night stretched too long, swallowing candles, and the dark became another kind of hunger.

It was the end of the world when the water turned to dust, when the mothers stood in line for hours and came home with nothing but empty hands, when the children learned to chew on air and call it survival.

It was the end of the world when the sky shattered, when the buildings folded like paper,
when the ground became a mass grave before the bodies could even be counted.

It was the end of the world when the hospitals filled with the injured, the dying, the lost,
and still, the world said there was no room for them.

It was the end of the world when the border stayed shut, when the medicine was stopped at the gate, when the lungs of the living grew too weak to scream.

It was the end of the world, again, and again, and again and still, the world goes on, turning its face to something easier to hold.

But in the ash, a child lifts a broken kite. Somewhere, a mother sings through cracked lips. Somewhere, a father digs with bare hands,

searching for what the sky tried to steal.

It was the end of the world, but they are still here.

They are still here.

Merry Man

Noah Mayo

Saloon doors swung open, letting in noon sunlight, as well as Mason Lee, accompanied by his son Harland Lee. Their work overalls were dried in mud and grass, their gloves worn and torn, dress shirts repurposed as neckerchiefs, and old boots missing spurs. Mason wore a flat stalker hat, a dark rim covering his eyes. Mason was a pale, old, graying man, yet still spry and youthful in aptitude. His face was naturally sullen and dark, his eyes sockets were deep and his bones reached through his skin to show themselves, he had easily resembled a dying man if you hadn't seen him in action, the muscles he had put to work on his farm. Harland was the spitting image of his father. A much younger man, Harland was capable of more, but he simply didn't have the strength his father did. He was a lanky boy, capable of the bare minimum needed, and he was content just with that, but the calluses dotting a map on his hands told another part of the story. They strode to their lone table, their steps tracked mud in, but the sole bartender, Jesse, was beyond caring. She was middle-aged in truth, but years of sour customers had aged her a decade, her old vest had the makings of semi-formality, it being the only thing differentiating her from "owner" of the ran-down establishment, and plain "squatter" of said run-down establishment. The saloon was dead, long past its prime, no bustle or crowds, just dark silence. Mason and Harland preferred it as such. Mason hung a satchel bag around his chair, reaching to

stuff an object from his hip into its pockets. Jesse walked up to greet her only patrons.

"Nice to see y'all here again. How's things?"

Mason dropped into his chair, lackadaisical.

"Just whiskey, Jesse."

Harland pulled out his chair to sit, exhausted.

"Things are alright ma'am, you?"

Jesse passive aggressively turned to only face Harland.

"You can guess, slow... but I thank you for asking."

"Now I feel sorry for not getting anything." Harland jested.

"Don't worry about it Harland." Jesse politely excused herself away from their table, walking behind the bar and into the back room, though not before glaring towards Mason. Mason noticed, but didn't address it. He leaned into the table, driving a groove through the wood with his elbows, staring towards his son.

"Well... you ready now?"

Harland let out a breath he was holding since they ar-

rived.

“You don’t wanna sit just for a bit here?”

“You said it was important. Were you wrong?” Mason retorted.

“It is. But... you’re not going to like it, sir.”

Mason shifted in his chair, his stare unbreaking.

“Well, now I’m interested.”

“It’s just hard to say is all... sir.” Harland shrank in his chair.

Mason almost chuckled at that, “I swear to you, I can handle whatever you give me.”

Harland breathed in and out, gathering his courage. He sat up straight, trying to desperately appear serious and grown.

“I... I’m done. I don’t want anything more to do with... it. I’m out.”

Mason sat still unshaken, staring, silently thinking.

“What precisely... are you talking about son?”

“You... you know?” Harland’s serious posture crumbles.

“It’s nothing against the law, Harland. You can say it.”

“Sir... what we do... what we did, it wasn’t something I’m proud of.”

“Pride ain’t something to hold onto, son. In what we do, it doesn’t matter.”

“It mattered to me.” Harland strayed his eyes away from his father’s gaze, rustling in his chair.

“Then that was your problem, pride. And for what?” Mason almost found confusion, but he knew what Harland’s issue was.

“It’s a problem that I ain’t proud of-” Harland lowered his voice, despite being the only two in earshot.

“-of killing men?”

“Wanted men.” Mason spit his words.

“That matters less to me than you think.”

An exasperated sigh let out of Mason, one he was similarly holding in since they arrived.

“...Why?”

“We ain’t bounty hunters. We’re not lawmen. We’re just... living out here. But your idea of a relaxing time is-”

“Dirty work.” Mason scoffs. “Work that needs, and will always need, doing.”

“I understand... that... but I don’t want it. I don’t think it’s good for me... simple as.” Harland slumped into his chair, getting quieter and more shallow with every word, as if he was ashamed.

The saloon is dead once again, this time still holding two souls inside. For a minute they did not speak, much less glance towards each other. Stuck in thought.

“...If you’re good at something, it’s difficult to find a good reason to stop. I’m good at... making money... son. I’m real great. That something, that’s inside me, for good. It ain’t a thing that changes just cause the century turned.”

“You’re not making money. You just... do it.”

“We do it...did it. Say what you please son, but you were good at it too. All that training... how couldn’t you

be?”

Harland looked down at his hands, cradling his kneecaps in his palms.

“...I did what you asked of me, that’s all. I learned to wield, I learned to defend myself. Everything else, that was just you.”

“What happened to all those men, it’s something they brought upon themselves, if it weren’t us, sooner or later it would’ve been some other gun. You don’t need to help me. But you ain’t convincing me that it was wrong.”

Harland sat back up in his chair, his expression colored in frustration, and worry.

“I’m not trying to tell you that. I’m just telling you, I don’t want it. I don’t need it. And... you don’t need it either.”

“...You’re free to go, Harland.” Mason almost sang his words, pleased to be putting the argument to bed.

Harland tried to hide his disappointment, and failed in trying. He stood up, reached into pocket, pulled out some cents and laid them on the table for Jesse. Harland without even a glance, walked past his father and towards the saloon doors. As Harland passed him by, Mason’s face dropped, as if all at once realizing Harland was really going. He too wore a face of disappointment. As Harland reached to push the saloon doors open, a man bursted inside first, a man older than Harland, though younger than his father. He was dirty with dust and grime, carrying a newsboy cap adorning his balding head, and a moth-eaten jacket, hanging on his shoulder. Before he could even look down to see it, Harland felt the ice cold barrel of a Schofield revolver, poking him in the ribs.

Harland barely bleated out “...Mister...?” before the man poked him harder, this time square in the chest, push-

ing it backwards into the saloon. He gestured toward the table with the revolver, Harland had no choice but to comply. With his hands in the air, Harland slowly backed up to the table with his father. Mason looked up from the spot in the table he was staring at, just then noticing how his son had returned.

“Listen, Harland-”

“Dad-” Harland tried interjecting, before the revolver was raised up to his temple, entering Mason’s view for the first time. Mason chose then to be silent. Jesse walked back into the saloons main bar room, no whiskey in hand. A repeater was tucked into her spine, held by a much bigger man. He much resembled the man with the schofield, at most in clothing. He was bulkier of course, and younger man, though his face was scarred enough to masquerade as an old man, or at least a very ugly one. The big man pushed Jesse further into the middle of the room, placing his hand onto her shoulder and forcing her down into a chair at a table, separate from Mason’s and Harland’s. The man with the revolver pointed his barrel to Harland’s former chair, gesturing him to sit right back down. Harland had no choice but to comply . The man pulled up a nearby chair, sitting across from Mason, and to the side of Harland.

“Where are your firearms?” He finally speaks.

“Satchel bag.” Mason calmly states.

The bigger man paused guarding Jesse, walked up to Mason’s chair, and picked up his satchel bag, rustling inside it before looking back up to the man with the revolver, and nodding. He

took the bag back to where he was standing with Jesse. The man glared towards Harland expectantly.

“I... left it at home.” He almost whispered his words, unsteady.

The man stared at Harland for a quick moment, before choosing to believe him. He placed his revolver down in front of him on the table. For the tiniest of minutes, the saloon was quite, the almost desolate creak of the floor boards, the screech of Harlands chair, nervously shuffling, and the panting breaths of the old man in front of Mason and Harland, old and especially tired.

“Do you know me?” The man stared daggers at Mason.

“No. I don’t.”

“You wouldn’t. People like you don’t.”

Mason studied the man’s face, trying to recall his features, but he could not.

“Do you remember a town out East, in New Mexico, called ‘White Oaks?’”

Mason stopped studying, his face softened, and then just as quickly turned into a grimace. The man turned his head to Harland, studying the boy, just as Mason did him.

“...This is your son, isn’t he?”

Mason’s silence, and slowly forming fearful expression, was the only answer he needed.

“You have uh... the same nose, eyes, all that...”

The man paused, before stowing away his shock, and putting back on his anger.

“I didn’t expect- this. ...It don’t matter.”

“Harland-” Mason began.

The man planted his hand onto the grip of the revolver, clutching it as it sits on the table, unmoving but ready.

“What happened to his mother?”

“Cholera.” Mason plainly stated, almost averting his gaze from the man. The man turned again towards Harland.

“For that I’m... sorry. It’s terrible. A terrible feeling.”

Harland barely choked up his words out of fear. “It is.”

The man exhaled out, pulling the revolver closer to his edge of the table.

“Did he tell you... who he is? What he was?”

Harland didn’t know whether to tell the truth or act dumb, he felt the weight of the revolver rest on the table.

“He- He told me some. Stories and such... He told me he was a thief.” Harland dared to glance away from the man for a moment, towards his Dad. He was telling the extent of what he knew. Mason didn’t look back.

“He was an outlaw. He took what wasn’t his, and... he killed people he didn’t like. That’s who he was.”

“Mister-” Mason began again.

“Stop.” The man gritted his teeth hard, as if they were about to shatter. Mason silenced himself.

“I had a son. He passed away. He was killed... for no good reason.”

Confusion, and then sudden realization, dawns on Harland. The man turned his whole body in his chair towards Mason, hand still clutching the grip of his revolver.

“I... obsessed over it for a long time. My wife obsessed over it... for the rest of her life. It was such a long time ago.”

Mason could only look back into the man’s gaze.

“My son... that’s what my life is now.”

The man only glanced his eyes at Harland, not taking his full attention off Mason just yet.

“How old are you, kid?”

Harland was stiff as a corpse, whispering out his words.

“Seventeen, sir...”

The man scoffed lightly.

“That’s only a little older than my son.” A half smile formed on his face for only a moment, before dissipating.

“How is your life, kid? Is it... pleasant?”

Harland feared what information the man did and did not know. Wanting to be anything but caught in a lie, he reluctantly told the truth, the full truth, as he knew it. Harland nervously glanced at his father for comfort.

“It is. For the most part. No mom for a while, just... my father. I was young, twelve I believe. Uhh... s-since then, it’s been different. Without her of course, but... my Father...” Harland shifted his eyes toward Mason, as if instead saying the next words to him directly, “...He thought I needed to grow up, to prepare myself. He-He said that ‘This world is cruel, and it will take from you, even at your very lowest.’ That there was nothing I could do... to stop it, it’s just life. He said... that it’ll make me stronger, I’ll be better for it, matured. And that sometimes I could-... I could choose what to lose, something I wanted... and I could replace it with something I needed.”

Harland didn’t ask with words, but he locked eyes with his father, and through his absence of words, Harland took it as permission.

“He taught me to handle myself. He taught me to-” Harland stopped himself. “-to defend my family.”

“We hunted down and killed a group of rustlers, just a

few miles from here.” Mason interjected. Harland couldn’t hide his dismay, but he stayed silent as Mason spoke. “I did it. He watched. I wanted him to see it. What was expected... and needed. Not for me, but for him. I had him grow up, he learned more with me in this little time than most men ever would in a lifetime. To protect himself, his family, to shoot and kill what needs to be... I didn’t want him to hurt people, not if he didn’t have to, yet. I did good by my son.”

“And mine?” The man spoke up, shutting Mason down once again, hand clutching the grip.

“I didn’t teach my son to point guns at people, and choose if they should die... But he picked one up anyway.” The man’s voice broke, closing his eyes, imagining. “He thought that he was big and strong. He made friends...” The man opened his eyes briefly, looking his compatriot across the saloon in the eyes, sullen. “They put that gun in his hand. He just wanted to impress his new friends. So he took it. Found the meanest looking man in town... and pointed it at him. That man shot him dead through the chest. He was my son. He was fifteen years old. He would’ve been thirty-five.” The man’s voice was shaken and sorrowful.

Harland could do nothing but watch. Watch his father sit and stew, take in the words. Watch the man tear up, clutching the grip in his hand, finger grasping for the trigger.

“All I can say is, I’m sorry.” Mason finally made eye contact with the man, he did not flinch when the man slid his finger over the trigger.

Harland finally understood. Why his father felt that need to do good, in the only way he knew how, his forms of repentance, and

how little that guilt meant now. Why he wanted him

to be strong, to be ready. Harland felt ready. He tucked his hand into his back waist belt, grasping his own cattleman revolver, the one he lied about having. Harland learned that Mason was an outlaw, the worst kind. But he was also his dad, that did not change in his mind.

The man finally raised the revolver to Mason's temple, finger on the trigger.

"I am too." The man let it out like a breath, his chest caving in, what was, the last bit of relief.

Three shots went off in the saloon. The first, tore through the silence, and through the man's throat. His old tired eyes went wide. He toppled out of the chair, clutching his pouring wound. The briefest second passed, before Harland turned in his seat and shot through the bigger man's chest, one through the lung, the last through his heart, before he could even raise his gun, splattering the table behind him, and falling. The shots rang in their ears, shock coursing through the room. Harland stood to survey the mess, and saw that the man was still with them, pawing at his neck, in abject horror. Harland raised it to the man's head.

Mason clutched the barrel, overtaking Harland's grasp on the gun, Harland didn't even fight it. Mason stood over the man for a moment, looking into his eyes. Harland didn't know what his father saw then, but what he saw gave him pause. The man looked up at Mason in fear, darting around in desperation, and finally as he went, they turned into what Mason could only describe as acceptance. Mason did not shoot the man cold. He just let him go.

"...You need to go home, son."

Harland didn't speak, but his face told enough. It's like he thought about and finalized it all in his head all in one instance. Confusion, worry, fear, sadness that it ended like this. He saved his family, but he couldn't really stay.

Mason thought he was going to die, but he didn't, thanks to his son. He would've had it that he did, he knew he had it coming. He knew no matter what, he couldn't stay anymore, not for Harland. He taught him enough to protect himself. He was a good father, in moments. That was enough.

Without fighting, Harland understood what needed to happen, and why. He left his gun with the father, and silently and hesitantly embraced him. They hugged for a long moment, before parting.

"Just keep going... I love you son."

Harland didn't respond, but staring into his father's eyes for the last time, Mason knew.

Harland hurried through the back-door of the saloon, gone. Jesse was left in the mess with Mason.

"Jesse, could you do me a favor?"

"...Of course." Jesse answered, despondent.

"I need you to visit Sheriff Alloy's office, let em know there's... been some trouble."

Jesse understood, rushing out the saloon doors.

Mason sat in the mess of the saloon, waiting, clutching the revolver in his hand, between two fresh corpses. He wanted it to happen, he was ready for it. Twenty years and he was finally ready. He didn't want forgiveness, he didn't deserve it. His son still saved him.

When he swings, he'll wonder if he taught him all the right things. He'll wonder if Harland will be okay. He'll be thankful he got to say goodbye.

Tide

Suhmuntu

Arrived.

Like a gust of wind from behind,
I didn't think you'd be the first to say hi.

Hesitant.

My outstretched hand waited patiently
For yours to intertwine with mine.

Acceptant.

Comforted as you held me,
You followed me out into the blue.

Laughed.

I heard you splashing, playing,
A connection of togetherness.

Afraid.

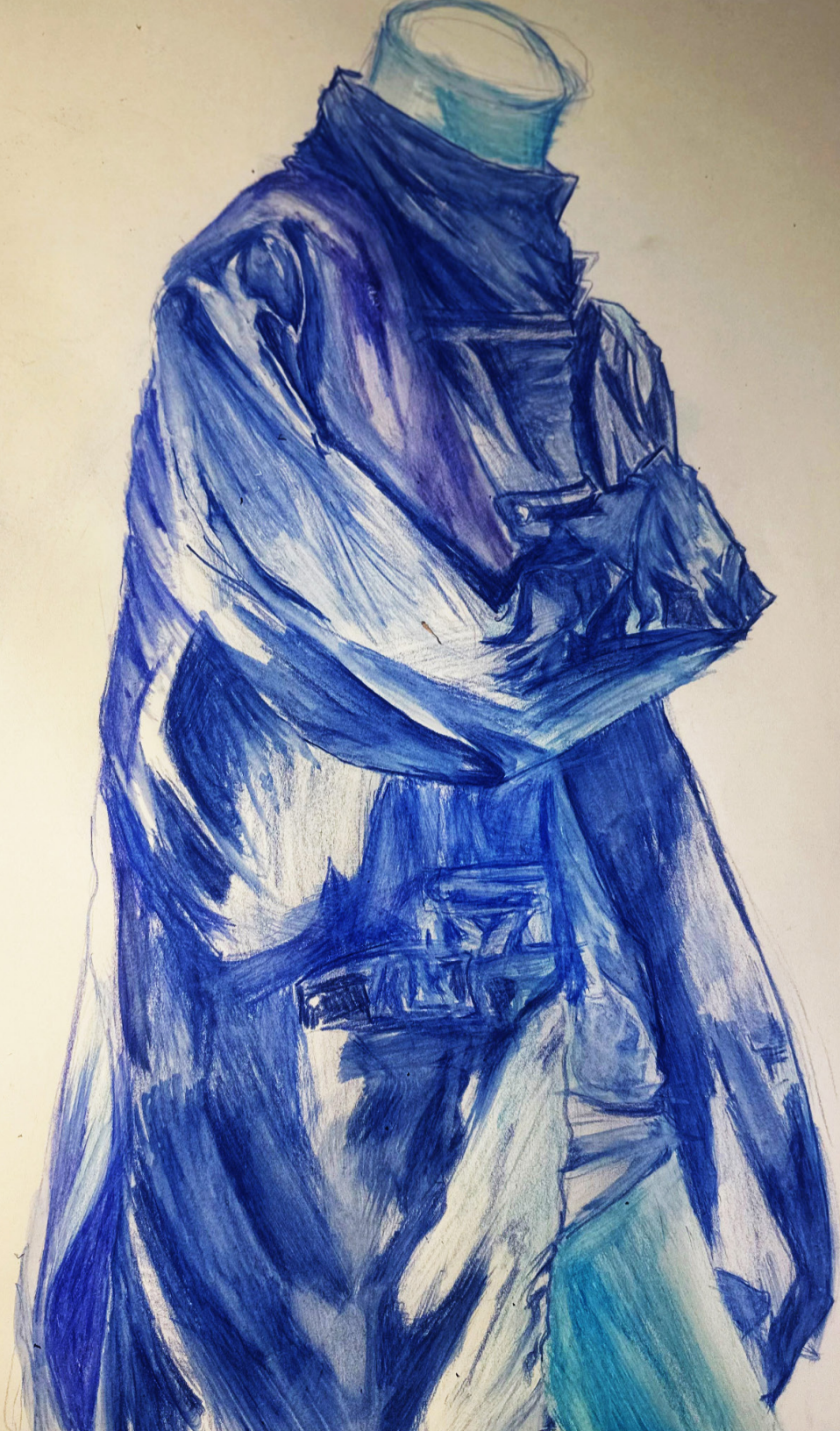
I tried to urge you further,
Release intimidated you to retreat.

Betrayed.

As the tide grew nigh I succumbed to a realization:
I've been blinded by excitement.

Abandoned.

Succumbing to the waves, I reached for help,
The imprint of you still memorized in mine.



Folds

Ricardo Castillo

Watercolor Pencil

Days of Personal Peace

Personal Reconciliation—Responsibility, Accountability and Forgiving Self

Arnold Brown

For many years, I knew neither peace nor personal reconciliation. Consequently, my childhood desire to help people eluded me. Thus, on May 20, 2013, I ran to my Heavenly Father for help.

“Privately He answered me.” He gave me strength, He provided me with direction, and He enabled me to choose the right no matter the consequences. Four days later, I turned myself in to the authorities and begun the process of taking responsibility for the crimes that I had committed.

The first few days in jail were tough; I needed to remind myself that I had turned myself in to be held accountable for my sins; for I had rebelled against God, against my victims and against their community. In addition, I had rebelled against my family, my community and against myself.

During the two years I spent in the county jail, I was guided by the quiet hand of the Savior to make commitments to be honest and sincere as I addressed my deepest personal conflicts so “that perhaps...[perhaps one day I could] be an instrument in God’s hands to bring some soul to repentance; and this is my joy.”

Time does not permit the details of my journey under the calming hand of the “Prince of Peace”, but time does allow me to say, “I take no credit for the transformation

that is taking place in me”. However, I do testify that the Lord works from the inside out.

As I reflect back on turning myself in, I don’t regret doing so because it was on that day that I experienced how the Lord “reaches my reaching”...to calm my troubled heart.”

Today I am grateful for the process of personal reconciliation because it enables me to end the cycle of creating victims. Furthermore, being accountable for my actions and taking responsibility for my behavior has paved the way for me to be an instrument in God’s hands.

To echo, as my own, the words of a Book of Mormon prophet, “when I see many of my brethren truly [remorseful], and coming to the Lord their God, then is my soul filled with joy. Then do I remember what the Lord has done for me, even that He [has answered] my prayer. Then do I remember [how the Lord reaches my reaching...with] His merciful arm which He extends towards me.”

Unlike many years ago, Today, I know peace and today, I know personal reconciliation; as a result, I get to fulfill my childhood desire to help people so that they too, can know peace and they, too, can know personal reconciliation, and this is my personal joy.

“Radical”

Jesus Martinez

They call me radical, as if it binds,
a word to cage these open minds.
But I was raised with a simple creed,
one I’ve held dear in thought and deed:

“Treat others how you want to be treated,”
a world where kindness isn’t defeated.
Yet here, where wealth becomes the goal,
they call it naive, this care for the soul.

What they call radical, I call clear,
a vision of justice, bold and near.
A life where love stands hand in hand,
with dignity for every land.

They call me impractical, lost in dreams,
but I see truth in golden streams—
a world made whole, a heart set free,
where love, not power, shapes the sea.

So if “radical” is what I am,
I wear it proud, with steady hand.
For to shape a world that love completes,
is just the golden rule, made concrete.

Meet Me Again

Mariana Vizcarra Moya

Laura hasn't seen Renne in almost nine years, all communication between them was cut. They were once the best of friends, having met in elementary school, it was rare to see one without the other nearby. Friends and family would always tease that they were practically attached at the hip. Living only twenty minutes from each other also didn't help with that, sleepovers were a bi-weekly occurrence. They were all in the same school sports and clubs, even attended the same college.

She can't exactly place when it happened but they both started to pull away from the other, a mutual decision that neither ever discussed. Schedules were suddenly very busy, conversations became short and awkward. Plans were getting cancelled last minute and trips home never coincided. Laura didn't want to distance herself but she felt like she needed it. Being around Renne gave her too big of feelings for her to handle. The fluttery feeling in her chest that once felt comforting turned suffocating. Too many thoughts were running through her head that she didn't understand, she wanted to put a stop to them. She met someone else eventually, someone she could laugh with and show her new experiences. Her partner was attentive and supportive. She was deeply happy with them but she couldn't shake the feeling that something was missing. Wondered if maybe she was confusing comfort with affection. She had hoped she would feel a spark between them, like the many romance

books said existed, something for Laura to know that what she was feeling was indeed love.

Laura made her way to her hometown even though she doesn't like going there often, she always gets a tight feeling in her chest when she has to drive through the city she and Renne used to live in. Laura makes sure her business is done quickly but by sheer luck and misfortune to her, she runs into Renne. It's a genuine shock for her to see Renne, she wasn't aware that she still lived there. Their conversation was short, just an exchange of pleasantries and a promise to meet again. The diner they would frequent during college on Sunday. The inopportune meet-up left Laura rattled the rest of the day, unable to focus on her job. She considered not going, standing her up and leaving her in the past forever, but she knew she could never do that. That indescribable feeling and pull appeared once more. Whatever complicated feelings she has for her old friend are swiftly pushed down. Renne hasn't been in her life for years and she found someone who loves her more than anything. A casual coffee get-together isn't going to change that.

Laura arrives first at the diner. It's surprisingly calm despite it being a Sunday morning. The usual overlapping chatter is gone, none of the cooks are yelling, only light music can be heard coming out of the speakers. The wall-

paper hasn't changed, the only difference was the yellowing of it from years of smoke, vapor, and sun. The faux leather of the seats had more cracks in them than she remembered. There is a booth in the corner by the window, away from the kitchen and the handful of tables that were having breakfast. They used to love sitting by a window watching the people go by. She stared nervously out onto the street both hoping for and fearing the possibility of Renne not showing up. What could they talk about, should she apologize for the radio silence? Just how much have they changed since they last saw each other?

Renne came into view and she looked exactly as she did all those years ago, with the same shining red hair and the soft pastels she used to wear. She had expected her to look different as she had. Her hair was much longer now, her clothes fit her better and she had finally developed a personal style he felt comfortable in. Laura sat there frozen, just watching Renne enter the diner as if in slow motion. All the nerves of seeing and talking to her had made her tense all morning. But the moment Renne sat down in front of her it all melted away. She felt herself going back to how they used to be. Spending hours talking about everything and nothing at all, the warm hugs, and gentle hands braiding hair during a sleepover.

"Hi." Renne said, a little out of breath taking the seat in front of her

"Hi, how have you been?" Laura replied, still a little dazed.

"Good. Good. Life's been good. How about you, how are things?"

"Oh y'know, work has been keeping me busy, being the best attorney in the city and all." Laura was very proud of her work, and being awarded that unofficial title gave her much confidence. All those sleepless nights are finally paying off.

"Wow, I always knew you would do great things." Renne beamed a smile at her and she couldn't help but blush a little.

The waiter came and dropped down the menus in front of them. The menus were the only thing she noticed that were new. Laminated pages were held together by a key ring, they were smooth and shiny, no peeling on the edges quite yet. As Laura reached for it she saw a small flash come from Renne. There was a simple silver band on her finger.

"You're married?" Laura sounded a bit more shocked than she intended to.

Renne quickly glances at her hand before meeting her eyes again.

"Engaged actually, you remember Sarah, right?" Laura nodded.

Sarah was a mutual friend of theirs, she was outgoing and beautiful. Laura had always suspected that Renne had a thing for her.

"I finally asked her out a couple of years ago, and well now we're getting married." Renne's smile was small, the tone of her voice a shy kind of cheerful.

"What about you, anyone in your life?" She continued.

"My partner and I have been together for about two years now."

They spent the next few minutes in silence. Looking over the menu that looked exactly the same outside of the shiny new pages, until the waiter came back to get their order. Orders that haven't changed since the last time they ate there almost ten years ago. Their conversation picked back up, casual and light-hearted. They talked about everything and nothing at all, as if no time had passed between them.

Throughout the meal Renne would occasionally check her watch, and her phone was on the table within reach. Always ready to answer a call or leave at a moment's notice, it has always been like this. It used to make Laura feel as though she could never be a priority. An insecurity of not being enough crept up again, but Renne only ever wanted to be helpful and be there for others, she could never fault her for that. She learned to not let it bother her. The meal was just about over and Renne went to check her phone, her head shot up to look at Laura.

"Wait, your birthday is next week!"

"It is," Laura replied slowly.

"Let's do something to celebrate. Together."

"Like what?"

"Let's meet up here again, it'll be like the old times. Just you and me. What do you say?" Renne was looking at her eagerly.

"Yeah let's do it, Sunday? Same time?"

"That's perfect," Renne was smiling brightly.

They made Sunday meetings at their diner a regular thing. Laura would usually be the one to show up first and they would sit at the same booth by the window. It felt nice to get her friend back. Weeks turned to months and they never seem to run out of topics to discuss. Renne never mentioned her fiancé after the first meet up, and Laura didn't talk about her partner either. They had created their own little world and forgot about everyone else.

All the time they spent together made Laura feel like she was young again. That fluttery feeling in her chest that she hadn't felt in years came back. It was terrifying to have that back. It made her realize that those feelings she kept ignoring and pushing away was the love she tried so hard

to feel. A love that grew and intensified as the years went on. Something that she knew was never going to leave. She needed it to, there was a reason it didn't happen before and there was an even bigger reason it would never happen now. Her partner noticed her inner turmoil but there was no way to explain it without it causing them to end their relationship. She wasn't going to let that happen over a childhood romance that never happened.

The best way to move on was to get it all out of her. She is going to find a way to tell Renne and hope that it doesn't ruin this one little thing that formed between them. Nothing will come out of the confession. Nothing can come out of it. All Laura can hope for is to get some sort of closure and maybe, if luck is on her side, not lose her friend again.

By the next time they see each other Laura is just as nervous as the first time. She spent all week trying to form the right words to tell Renne. How does one articulate that they have been in love for years and will probably never stop, but they want to stop and are only telling them so they can start the moving on process, and also that they still want them in their life even if it's just for coffee on the weekend. She had been driving herself crazy trying to find the right words and just how to bring it up in a way that wasn't awkward or clunky.

The nerves didn't fully go away as Renne sat down in front of her, they started talking like usual and all Laura hoped for was that Renne didn't notice how tense she was. Their conversation kept going and the diner got busier, filling up with busy chatter, phones ringing, laughter booming throughout the small diner, and the yelling from the kitchen staff almost drowning out the music that played from the speaker, it gave Laura the last bit of strength needed to have the conversation. The people around them won't know what is going on, too wrapped up in their own worlds to even think about the two women sitting in the booth by

the window.

Whatever story that Renne was telling comes to an end, and as silence overtakes them Laura faces her with as serious a face as she can muster, to try and hide the fact the anxiety of this is eating her alive.

“Renne, I’ve been meaning to tell you something, something I probably should’ve said a really long time ago. But you know how hard it is for me to understand my own feelings, much less talk about them but I need to-” Her rambling gets interrupted by Renne reaching over and placing her hand on Laura’s, soft and gentle. The gesture is comforting and she is looking at her with a small smile and an emotion behind her eyes that Laura can’t quite put her finger on.

“I know Laura.” They stare at each other for a few seconds before Renne starts talking again. “I know what you’re trying to say and I feel the same.”

She lowers her gaze to their joined hands as she continues.

“Y’know I spent a long time thinking about what could’ve been, but we’ve grown and are different people now. We’ve made lives for ourselves completely separate from each other. There’s no use dwelling over what if’s.”

“I love you, Renne, I really do. I don’t think I ever stopped.” Laura said quietly, she felt tears forming but refused to let herself cry at this moment.

“I love you too, I always will.” Renne’s voice was barely audible over the diner’s hustle and bustle. “But I’m getting married in two weeks, it may not be the same but it’s enough for me. Let it be enough for you too.”

“Do you think we can still see each other? Even if it’s just this, as friends, I just- I don’t want to lose you again.”

“I don’t want to lose you either, I want you as my friend.”

Their eyes meet once again, this time with tears that they try to blink away.

“See you next Sunday?”

“Yeah, see you next Sunday.”

Dalila

By Connor Shwartz

Torrent streams course through green meadows,
As we lay together on a hill
Holding hands, fingers entwined
Feeling the world itself stay still

Deep within a mountain's echo
Or beyond the stars that paint the night sky
My heart will hold your burning flame
I'll keep you close as the years pass by

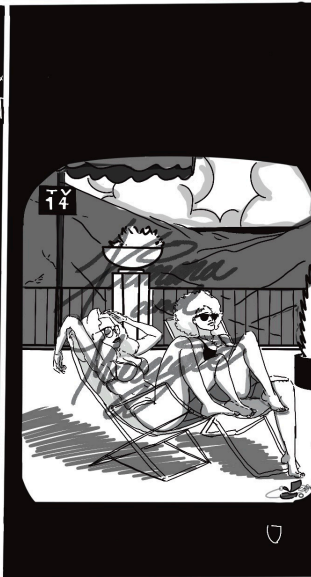
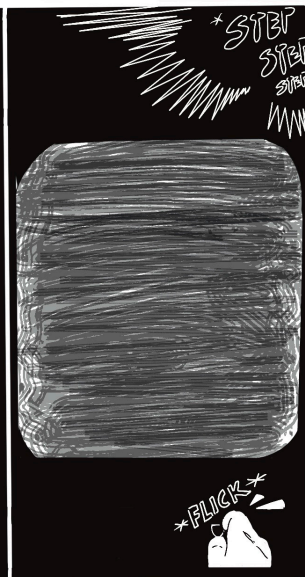
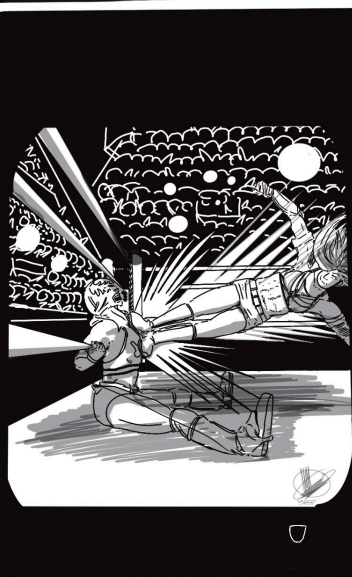
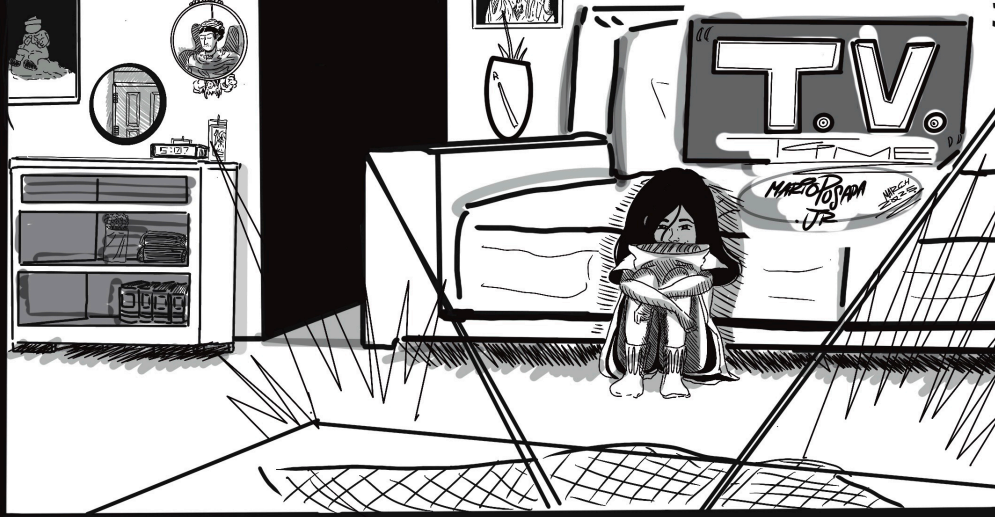
Sometimes, I can't find the right words to say
But you brighten my heart in your own special way
I hope you always know deep down...
Eres el pan dulce de mi café

I love you!

Desire

Alex Zapien

My Desire, talking to you is like watching a rainbow, wonderful and sweet, and all wrapped up in sunshine.



TV Time

Mario Posada Jr

Comic

Letter to Covin

Sean Scanlan

My sweet little boy Covin whom I love and miss and think about every day. I have constantly thought what a letter to you would look and sound like and

It's been a while since we've talked. How are you doing? I don't know how to write this letter, which is why it has taken so long to write. It's easy for me to write in my journal every day because the information just comes out as the day unfolds. Writing to you is much more difficult because I don't know how to compose the info I want to say because there is so much, I don't even know where to start. So I'll start with "Hi. How are you?" I've never not thought about you. My day begins with thoughts of you and what you are doing. Are you happy or sad? Where are you at that moment? Throughout the day I wonder what you are doing. When my day ends it ends with thoughts of you and wonder what your day was like, was it good or bad. In my mind I say goodnight to you every night before I go to sleep. I missed you.

Fear of Covin having a learning disability

Covin,

Hi, my son it's me your dad it's been a while since we've talked or have seen each other. I have constantly thought

what a letter to you would look like but trying to express my feelings and emotions is actually really hard which is why it has taken me so long to write this. One thing that really made it difficult is you keep getting older and my time with you froze at 6 years old and now you're 14. How do I evolve in my frozenness? How do I talk to this young man? I had to grow within myself to understand how all that works? It takes time but today after much time, I have grown to understand so much Covin.

One thing that has never changed is how much I love you and how much I miss your sweet face and your little voice that pops up in my head all the time. You're much taller now and your voice isn't so small anymore, but you will always be my little boy.

One of my closest memories is something you constantly talked about was volcanoes and how at any moment one would just erupt even at the beach. For one of your last homework assignments while attending the Spanish immersion school in San Juan Capistrano your topic was volcanoes. You had to read your entire presentation in Spanish then you passed out little chunks of lava rock we bought to everyone in your class. You did so well, and I was so proud of you Covin.

Another important memory that I constantly think

about and share when an opportunity comes up is when you were really little, maybe two years old. I worked for an optical and sunglass place called Sunglass Gallery in Laguna Beach for about 10 years 2001-2011. I think this day I was working and your mom brought you in to say hi. Well, I was busy helping a customer, but I had several customers waiting for my services. Two of the customers were a couple with a young daughter who was paralyzed completely with an obvious cognitive impairment and completely mute besides her big smile. She was in this special chair with many moving parts to keep her comfortable and sitting straight to stabilize her small fragile frame. As I was helping my customer, I noticed the parents of that little girl in that special chair fixated on something with this unforgettable look on their faces, a look of overwhelming love and admiration towards this little boy who was hand feeding their daughter, a task that they did every day. I mean here is a child, two years old who is meticulously picking out a cracker from a satchel and gently placing it in the little girl's mouth, in essence feeding her. The wonderment and awe for this little boy who displayed a behavior that could never be taught was astounding. It had to be an innate trait that developed all on his own. I realized then that this was going to be a boy who would grow into a young man of solid character, integrity and honor. A young man whom I, as a parent, just as those parents, were proud of.

Wolverine Illustration

Raymond Chen

Color Drawing



Freedom

David Sharp

At times, I believed that I knew love,
A gentle breeze and bright sky.
Slowly as the eons pass, I am smothered.
Layered in concrete and steel,
Like a living tomb I carry with me.
The darkness is complete and I forget.
Friendship. Hope. Longing and Loss.
Nothing to guide my footsteps.
This path leads nowhere.
Only one thing remains.
Freedom.

Amends

Alex Zapien

Living a better life is worth living
Living for others, is a life earned.
To live in God's playground
In humble humility
Peace and life in God's grace.

5 Billion Reasons Left

Essa Thabet

FADE IN:

1. EXT. CAFE BIENTÔT LA FIN - MARCH 30, 2002 12:13 pm- ORRY (26) is out with his friends LANCE(35), DAHLIA(22), JAY(22), and HANNAH(24). They are eating lunch and discussing how classes have been after their midterms.

LANCE: Maybe you panicked and didn't look at your SEP again—

JAY: (*Interrupts, mouth full*) Nuh uh!

HANNAH: (*Teases*) He's talking with his mouth full again.

JAY audibly gulps and sips his water as the table chuckles.

JAY: Look- Honestly, even if I messed up, I already paid for everything...

ORRY: Good news is you did need an extracurricular, and you got lucky with that professor, everyone says he's laid back, right?

ORRY keeps his eyes lowered as he fiddles with his Tamagotchi while sipping his coffee.

JAY: Yea, it's an easy A+ I just take notes and quizzes on a bunch of documentaries. Like, ooo, did you know the sun is gonna explode?

DAHLIA: Wait, is it like National Geographic? I love the articles!

ORRY then shakes his head, taking notice of what JAY said.

ORRY: Wait, what?

DAHLIA: Hm? Oh, uhm, the articles?--

ORRY: No, no, I meant Jay. What are you talking about?

ORRY puts his Tamagotchi aside and looks toward JAY in a confused yet amused state. Everyone else then goes quiet, trying to figure out what happened.

JAY: Uhhhh... The sun?

ORRY: Yeah?

JAY: Yeah, dude, you don't know what I'm talking about?

ORRY: No, I thought you were saying that as a joke or something. I was confused.

Everyone's eyes widen as they then realize ORRY doesn't know.

HANNAH: Dude, did they not teach you that or something?

ORRY: *(Laughs)* Teach me what? That the sun is gonna explode? How is a star going to go boom?

LANCE: Well...it dies. Like, it literally burns out.

ORRY then goes quiet as he starts staring at everyone.

ORRY: Wait, fucking hold on, you guys are actually serious?

DAHLIA: It's true, Orry. It will.

JAY: Yeah, but in like 5 billion years, right?

HANNAH: Mhm. But, Orry, seriously?

ORRY): What do you mean, “seriously”? Hannah, the Earth is fucking doomed. Is NASA not doing shit, or what?

LANCE: Orry, relax—

ORRY then gets up, packing his bag quickly.

ORRY: Hell no, I need answers or some- ...I don’t know dude. Imma hit the library. I need to figure this out...

JAY: Orry, this isn’t a big deal, we mean it! We learned this in elementary school. We’ll be dead naturally by then-

DAHLIA lightly smacks his shoulder, giving him a stern look as ORRY leaves quickly.

MATCH CUT:

2. INT. HION CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY - 1:54 pm- We match cut from DAHLIA’s stern look to ORRY staring down at each book he is searching for through multiple bookshelves.

LATER-After a quick montage of him grabbing up to 5 textbooks, he sits down and begins skimming through, digging for any hope of any sort.

INT. HION CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY - 7:46 pm- ORRY keeps reading through, his posture leaning heavily into the book, the LIBRARIAN then walks up to him, patting him gently on the shoulder, causing him to jerk involuntarily toward her direction.

LIBRARIAN: Uhm, sir, we’re closing in 15 minutes... I can check those books out for you if you want to take them home.

ORRY: I don’t have a library card on me.

ORRY turns back and continues reading through the book titled “5 Billion Years Left, by Walton Gilger.”

LIBRARIAN: I see... Well, if you’d like, you can come back tomorrow and I can help you set one up? For now, I’ll let you

finish up. Just remember to leave those books on the counter for me.

ORRY nods while the LIBRARIAN stares worriedly for a moment. She walks away as ORRY's eyes are still glued to the book, he continues reading intently.

MATCH CUT:

3. INT. ORRY'S COLLEGE DORM - MARCH 31, 1:17 am- We match cut to ORRY's eyes now glued to his laptop as he sits in a dark bedroom, scouring the internet for articles. Every failed result he finds begins to slowly break him.

ORRY: (*Whispers*) Thousand-dollar garbage...

ORRY pushes his laptop aside aggressively as he holds the same blank expression.

DISSOLVE TO:

4. INT. ORRY'S KITCHEN - April 6, 9:23 am- A week has passed, and we dissolved into a messy, deserted kitchen. It seems like no one is home

INT. ORRY'S BATHROOM - 9:23 am- A knock is heard off-screen from the front door. Then, a slam and scatter are heard from ORRY's bedroom.

ORRY:FUCK!!! WHAT?!

INT. ORRY'S FRONT DOOR - 9:24 am- The knocking continues, ORRY's bruised hand is then seen grabbing the knob and opening the door.

JAY: (*Sighs*) Shit, dude! Thank god! What is wrong with you?

ORRY: Been busy.

INT. ORRY'S LIVING ROOM - 9:25 am

JAY follows ORRY into the living room, witnessing the mess.

JAY: With what? We've been worried sick, call after call, man--

ORRY: (*Interrupts*) Yet, you didn't knock for a week?

ORRY walks away from the living room and goes to his bedroom.

JAY: Everyone wanted to give you some room after last week. But Dahlia and I weren't sure how long was necessary... Like I said, worried.

ORRY: Thanks, I guess...

ORRY walks back in with the same textbook from last week in hand. He plops down on the couch and starts reading through it, he seems to be 90% done with it.

ORRY: I'm fine, though.

JAY: No, you don't! I'm sorry if our reaction came out as hurtful, but we would never mean it like that!

ORRY: (*Reads*) You guys are fine, trust me.

JAY: Then what's going on?! You can talk to us, Orry, we've been in this college for 3 years now--

JAY then looks over and takes notice of ORRY's book. His eyebrows scrunch in confusion and realization.

JAY: 5 billion years left? Orry... Is this about the sun??

ORRY: Yes, it's about the sun, Jay. I'm going to figure out how to stop it from dying.

JAY: Orry!- sigh Orry, listen, you can't stop the sun from exploding. This is all not as serious as you--

ORRY then throws the book at the table, shattering the glass in the middle.

ORRY: IT'S SERIOUS TO ME!!!

JAY takes a step back, his eyes widen.

ORRY: IT'S ALL GOING TO BE OVER! MY LIFE IS GOING TO BE WASTED!!!

ORRY then falls to his knees, gripping the edge of the table with his left hand. JAY walks over and gets down on one knee, putting a gentle hand on ORRY's back.

ORRY: *(Cries)* My life... Jay, my life...

ORRY buries his face in his free hand as his tears seep down and drip onto the floor.

ORRY: I've done nothing... Everything I want to do, I won't be able to...

JAY: That's not true.

ORRY: It is. I'll be dead in 70 years, and I'll be a worthless corpse, forgotten and no longer with the people who gave a shit about me...

ORRY turns and looks up at JAY, his face bruised and eyes red.

ORRY: But- I really don't want to die, Jay... Please. You have to let me do this, you have to, please...

JAY: I know you don't want to die, buddy. I'm scared too... But, doing this?

JAY looks at the textbook on the floor, picking it up.

JAY: This will hurt you worse... You'll waste the rest of your life like you feared instead of living it.

ORRY: What do I do..?

ORRY weakly takes the book into his hand. JAY then gives him a soft smile with tears welling in his eyes.

JAY: *(Chuckles)* Well... The sun is gonna explode in 5 billion years. So do 5 billion things.

ORRY nods as he starts breaking down again. He hugs JAY, and JAY returns the gesture, both of them staying there as we pan away slowly.

JAY: You said you want to be a journalist, right?

ORRY: Yeah.

JAY: Well, Hannah said there was an open spot for her field trip to Alaska, I think. You should go with her.

INT. ORRY'S FRONT DOOR - 9:33 AM

ORRY: I don't think--

JAY: Do it! She can use her awesome photography skills, and you can write an awesome article!

END

Sophie Forever

Kara

Oil Paint



On Thursday I Forgot to Remove My Invisibility Cloak

Jesus Martinez

I raise my hand,
a small gesture,
a signal that I am here,
that I have something to give.

Their eyes pass over me,
pausing just long enough
to make me think
I will be heard.
Then-
...gone.

The conversation moves forward,
without me.
It's okay,
I look forward to the next class.

Again, I lift my hand,
a little slower this time.
A thought sits on my tongue,
waiting to be shaped into sound.
But they choose another voice.

And by the time they come back to me,
My thought's been spoken by another voice.
It's okay,
I look forward to my last class.

By the third time,
The desk and I
are the same shape.
I no longer try.
I let the room fold in around me,
my words retreating to paper,

Jesus Martínez

where at least they will exist,
even if no one reads them

A Letter

Aaron King

To a young Self,

I want to offer you something, but I wonder what I want you to hear. Perhaps I hesitate since you are so foreign to me now; you might as well be alien. Still, I want to give you something strong, something inspiring, something that will light your spirit and keep you marching, striving, and thundering through life – without a thought of regret, without doubt of love, without a second thought to the value of living.

But there is another part of me. A part of me that knows too much, that sees in my fantasy for you a desire for a childhood I never knew, a dream that never came to be, and a being that I know never is. What then can I offer you?

First, I offer this:

The world is not good, nor is it bad. It is neither of those things. Neither are people. The world is not concerned. The world is thoughtless, thoughtless as the acts of authentic mind.

Another thing: There is no such thing which you call hope. That too is illusion, a disappointment, a shallow expectation dressed in high language.

But fret not.

You well may reach what you aspire to. If you do not give up, eventually, you almost certainly will. Only, once you reach that place, you will see that what you envisioned was never truly what you imagined it to be, that the place you find yourself seems just another stop on a longer journey, toward some new vision that now entralls your imagination.

You may go on that way for some time, moving from place to place, from dream to dream. You may live your whole life this way. You may die never stopping to think that there was another way to be. Perhaps this will make you happy.

But I doubt it.

In time, your mind will convince you that those who oppose you, the obstacles you face, the injustices you encounter, the pain you incur through your journey – is evil. You will believe that there is a force that hates and hurts and does harm only to do harm. You may come to believe that you are aligned with what is right, and that you stand against what is wrong.

But I can assure you, you are not, you do not. This is but another illusion.

So I remind you: There is no evil in the world. Neither

is there good.

There are no bad people, there are no good people

For all you strive, I offer you this:

There is no success, and no failure.

You will not believe me.

But I speak now with a sober, lucid mind.

Though tomorrow I may tell you different. Yesterday perhaps I said something else.

But I speak truth now. And if I tell you something different tomorrow, I lie.

I may lie to you tomorrow anyway. I would prefer to. It feels much better to lie. It lets you believe. Lies offer you things that fill you with hope and comfort, and confidence in what is and what is not.

But that is dishonest.

So I apologize if I do lie to you.

I probably will. It feels better to see light in your eyes. It feels better to keep you blind. It feels better to pretend that you can stay that way forever. So I will probably lie.

Maybe that is the best that I can offer you. Perhaps here is my inspiration, my grand piece of advice, my invigorating proposal:

Lie more. Tell the truth less. Tell it seldom. Tell it only on those solemn occasions that require it. And think twice even then. Especially then – because truth is not for everyone. Truth is only for a lonely few. If you can make yourself one of those compulsive liars, count yourself among the lucky.

For it is better that you lie.

If you want to be happy, lie to everyone. Lie every day. Lie to your spouse, lie to you wife, lie to your kids, lie to your family. You will anyway. I don't have to tell you to. You are already lying.

First and foremost, lie to yourself. You must to be truly happy. So lie to yourself about your lying to everyone about everything. Then lie about that. Lying, of course, being the most important thing.

If that is still not enough, lie to yourself that you are “good”. Lie to yourself that the others are “bad”. Lie to yourself that you are happy.

Then you can die happy among those few good, of whose existence I remain skeptical.

Otherwise, if you are unwilling to lie, if you are so stubbornly preoccupied with telling the truth that you must lie about being honest to get a good night's sleep, then prepare for a life such as mine. Prepare for a life where there is little left to lie about. A life where the only things left to lie for are those few necessary to live. Prepare for a life where you cannot help but to see, where you cannot help but to hear, where you cannot help but to say.

Mine is a life of truth-telling – an ugly, ugly thing. A most undesirable, pretentious, and unseemly thing. It is the one thing that I advise you most strongly against.

But you insist. You maintain that you are not like the others, that you can withstand the truth, the sorrow, the horrendous honesty that they cannot.

You insist that truth is what you desire?

You insist that you stand among the dogged souls, the free-spirits, the rebels, the hardened, outspoken, rugged individualists?

Very well. You have brought it upon yourself. I have

warned you, and warned you again. I have offered you the garden and yet you chose the fruit. You would wish rather to lie rotting with the serpent in a grave of truth than live forever in God's green pastures.

I hear you. I feel you.

So hear this: Even you, the truth-teller, are the liar.

Truly, you are the biggest, fattest liar of them all. You and your insistence for honesty, really! Quite a yarn, when none lies as much as you. Even in that claim: You, the father of all lies? You mere rodent of deception, waiting for the serpent to swallow you.

Forget good, forget evil. There is more. It is least that you disguise your lies for realism. It is much more that you believe anything could be real. It is that you pretend to know that you could know, as if your stubborn will to truth were less a lie than any other. You are just as pretend as the rest. No, worse – you pretend to be unpretending.

But you are something like me, so I offer, finally, this:

Follow me, and you will find that lies only grow deeper the closer they approach truth. With time, you will come to recognize them as something inherent to the truth.

So bow. Bow, you truth-teller, bow before your kingdom of lies, your holy realm, your master, your curse. For it is only lies your truths comprise.

The World We Live In

Jose Zuniga

Every day I wake up I can't help but curse this world,
Just look around and see all the pain as I traverse this world.

We smile as we get our amazon packages, smile as we scroll TikTok,
smile as we pollute, smile as we coerce this world

Into servitude. Because being passive is being complicit, and complicity makes us guilty
but we shut our eyes so that we can't see ourselves pick up the spear and pierce this world

With unfettered capitalism. But we tell ourselves its ok we'll do better and
stick a green sticker with a leaf as we let this evil immerse this world

Into chaos while we sit on our hands and watch without
a second thought of what hurts this world

But there are those who don't give up, they still believe
and give their soul, open their shirt and try to nurse this world

But what am I to do, I can only wish to make up down, right wrong and wrong right,
make what is easy hard and what is hard easy and maybe one day reverse this world



Sunflower Foundations

Jesus Martinez

Digital

Mother!

Chloe Saldana

Perched high above it all, eyes glazing over the relative calm
This eerie unease creeping along the ridges of my spine.

I must descend—no! Leave them be in trust,
The blue of the oceans remain intact— a slight lie,

I detect tendrils of murky shades in the periphery.
Not to worry, through the healing ozone layers, I see
rectifications, solutions. Hark! Over there—blasting bullets punching
miniscule confetti through billowing clouds, mushrooms
clamoring for my attention. Distant echoes of screams,
A great cacophony that pulls at my guts.

My guard grows weary, I make my descent. Slowly,
I wade through confusion—debris coated in aluminum
come hurtling to derail my path. The scent of
fuel and foreign fury trails each object. Further below, booming
crashes hurl bits of mountain and flesh under my toes,
the whistling messages of Death screaming louder into
my ears. The colors in the oceans that breathed life
are sucked up into a slurping pop!
Sapped out, inkless and dying.

What's whirling within over there?

A bloated, floating country adorned with 1st place sashes
awarding plastic consumerism nonchalance.
Mutated signs of life—detected.

My throat seizes up,
my lungs threaten
to bust through its cage. I see it now, the poison
seeping into my skin, bubbling with heat.

What tastes linger on my tongue?

Is this what they call air now?
This rancid, abrasive cocktail
that blisters and burns and bakes the bodies
of oceans and flesh, no permission double vision.
Carbon emissions? —you have failed in your mission!

O, children!

My creations!

Of this home I breathed you into,
how have you fared like this? I hurry now
towards your pleas, your carcinogenic cries
curling around my shoulder blades, resembles
my fingers crook'd between the frosty tips
crumbling off the mountains
standing guard, under my command
to watch over you. Yet I see, through
the rubble and blackened fingertips
you blast off the very hills of houses
you claim was taken from your own children.

You dare!

From the river to the sea, this is Falastin!

Palms etched with crimson, knees
scraped raw and helpless, I feel
your time regress to justify caging children,
stamping immigrants with markers of
assigned shame, selling children to the bloody teeth
of the elite, exploitation of bodies—for helplessness
is a fortified aphrodisiac for the hellish sick.

The White Gang is here to tell your disabled, colored, trans kids that
you'll die before you earn back your rights!
Who are you kidding,
Education is for nobody—Big Brother will provide!
Burn all your books—AI can think for you, my child!

What more horrors ail my ears?

My nails are shredded into jagged splinters, the wailings
keep badgering my eardrums. Empty eyes gaze
up at me, punishing me for cowardly neglect—
questioning my absence while their throats were
scratched out raw from the inside.

What was their fault? they shouted—
I'm almost there, among the bleeding mothers
denied saving.

Rallies upon rallies to call out fascist greed,
Rallies upon rallies to call for more control—

When will you learn?

The tiniest hand, chalk-dusted and stiff,
reaching out to me
trapped stuck dead under buildings
under uprooted tectonic plates

A child actor wears “Zionism is Sexy” as a badge of honor, though!

I'm clawing my way down faster, chest heaving—

Sudanese children will never know childhood
as they are shred open day by day, child after child after child.

Who's actually sharing petitions, who's reposting this on Twitter?

I can't see clearly through all this toxic misery
Lands being stolen, bodies of their children buried
slanted and broken

into pieces that will grow only vengeful fruit for invaders.

Heed this forewarning!

Reverberating dislocated wailings overtake my senses

Discolored hills giving way as I stumble across

I am here, I am here

Trembling hands snake around my calves, claw at
my back, distorted mouths begging for salvation

The clouded, noxious air around me stifles

my thoughts, my blood of their blood

I finally place the deafening wailings—my mouth
open, letting in their sufferings to oscillate within

I choke it all out to beg for forgiveness.

My children! O, my children!

[g a s p]

What have you done?

What have you become?



CLOSED
UNTIL FURTHER
NOTICE

Lavender

Anthony Garcia

Church bells rang out, cutting through the muffled bustle of the hallway connecting to Vivian's room. They had so graciously lent her a place to get ready, one of the classrooms that they use for Sunday School. A room she had been in before, once as a student, and again as a volunteer, teaching the word of God to every new generation that entered the church, the same way it was instilled into her. The mirror they set up for her shined against the sterile lighting of the room, as she stood, admiring her attire. A beautiful, but modest, flowing dress that made her feel like a princess when she tried it on. Her mother practically jumped with joy when she exited the dressing room wearing it, so it seemed like the clear choice.

A quiet knock interrupted her thoughts - three short raps, one she had grown so used to. She didn't even think about it when she called out, "Come in!"

A woman opened the door and entered, quickly shutting it behind her as if she were worried someone would follow.

"Wow.." She whispered, eyes dragging from Vivian's hair to her makeup, down across the dress she was wearing, all the way to the long train that flowed behind her. "You look great. That dress looks perfect on you."

Vivian chuckled, looking down at the floor to avoid the

woman's gaze. "Thank my mom for that one. She picked it out."

Her companion clicked her tongue, circling her as she inspected the dress. "Well, you are gorgeous in anything." She leaned down to adjust the train, untangling it with a gentleness Vivian was so familiar with, "He's gonna love it."

The bride sighed a deep sigh, one that made her friend raise an eyebrow.

Images flashed behind her eyes. Conversations that would last deep into the night, ending in limbs tangled in a way only best friends could manage. The gentle caress of her beautiful hand in the quiet mornings, dragging along her face in silent admiration. Growing up by hiding together in church bathrooms, sneaking behind school buildings, having sleepovers that would last for days so they wouldn't have to utter the word goodbye. The woman who never left her side, who never would leave her side, the one that would be there after her family and lovers would see through her facade and realize the monstrosity she truly was.

"Is this a mistake?" Vivian suddenly asked, turning to look the woman in the eyes. There she stood, in a beautiful lavender dress, holding a bouquet like the brides Vivian saw in the catalogues her mother flipped through with her.

The light filtered through the window so beautifully that briefly, she envisioned her friend in those photos, posing so elegantly against regal backgrounds. She could back out now, and Mariann would take her, take her so far away and so fast that the town would hardly have a silhouette of her figure to remember her by.

And suddenly, Mariann's voice interrupted the train of thought before Vivian strayed too far. "Slow down. Where's this coming from?"

"I'm not sure. Just..." She looked off to the side briefly, avoiding the look of concern boring into her, "The way my mom talked about her wedding day. She was so excited to see my dad, even though they were only apart for a couple of hours. She couldn't wait to walk the aisle."

"...You don't want this?"

"No!" The outburst startled both of them, and somewhere deep inside Vivian felt a part of herself banging against the walls that closed her in, fighting to be set free, to be seen, to be known. But Mariann's expression crushed that hope, a flicker of hatred and disgust brewing beneath. "Well- yes! Of course I want to marry him," Vivian backtracked, "It's just..."

And then, that vitriol dispersed from Mariann's eyes, as she leaned in and placed a gentle hand on her friend's shoulder. It was replaced with something else—hope, maybe, or just an unconditional love—and whatever it was, it ensured she would never hate her partner (in crime, as the town would call them), never could.

"I think I'm doing this for other people."

For a moment, it seemed as if her maid of honor deflated at the revelation, but Vivian convinced herself she was imagining things.

"Well... just go out there. You know how you are! You

never think you'll have fun until you're already there." Mariann smiled, sliding the hand closer to her neck.

Vivian chuckled softly, leaning against the hand on her shoulder.

"You're right. You always are."

And then that hope flickered again in Mariann's eyes, undeniable and terrifying. "Always...?"

"Yes, always," Vivian suddenly turned to her maid. "Say the word. We could run. There's always a school for me to teach at."

Hope replaced with fear, Mariann's eyes widened when she was confronted, and she began to search her bride's face for something, anything to prove this wasn't what she wanted. "Vivian-"

"We could move to Vermont, like you always wanted," The desperation bled into Vivian's voice, and Mariann saw a terror in her eyes that she had never seen before. "All you'd have to do is say you want it. I'll be yours."

Ever cool in an emergency, Mariann took her friend's hands and faced the terror with calm reassurance. "I came in here to tell you your parents are looking for you. It's time for the first look."

There was a beat of silence, before the bride sighed that mournful sigh again.

"Right. Wish me luck!" She forced a smile and rushed out of the room before she had to face the look on Mariann's face.

Church bells rang out, reaching the farthest end of the parking lot where two men shared a cigar. It had been a wedding gift from a best man to a groom, but like many

things, it ended up being shared between them. Eric stared at the asphalt, like he had so many times before while waiting for his girlfriend to finish bidding farewell to her students. It looked the same as it always did, dull and unhappy to see him, and if he squinted, he could see Vivian in those rocks, seemingly pained by his existence. His nice shoes were scuffed from kicking the ground around too much, something that made his father tsk and chastise him about his carelessness.

The cigar being handed back to him pulled him from his thoughts. Pale hands wrapped around it, holding it firmly in front of him. Eric took it, and sighed.

“Thanks, Alex. I needed this.”

His best man smiled, handing off the cigar. “Hey, it’s the least I could do. Today calls for a celebration.”

Eric smirked, leaning against the car that held a decade of memories between them in its seats. “Does it now?”

“Well, yeah. You’re finally getting hitched,” Alex watched as Eric began to inhale that addictive smoke, exhaling it as he continued. “And...” The groom’s eyebrows raised, a knowing look crossing his face. “I met someone.”

Any smoothness Eric seemed to have vanished in an instant as he coughed the rest of his breath out, smoke flying from his nose and mouth in puffs like an old steam engine.

Alex’s hand flew to his back, patting against his lungs until he finally breathed in. “Sorry, that came out of left field. I just didn’t want to say something before and jinx it. But we’re moving in together in a month or two. In the city.”

Eric blinked, overly aware of the hand lingering against his heart. “Oh.”

Alex frowned, his eyebrows knitting together in a way so familiar to his friend. “What? You not happy for me?”

“Not that,” Eric quickly added, “Just didn’t expect it.”

Alex’s expression relaxed a bit, but his shoulders were tense when he pretended to shrug it off. “Yeah, fair enough.”

A heavy silence fell over them as the cigar continued to burn in Eric’s hands. Heavy, but not in the comforting way a weighted blanket would be— heavy like a pressure to succeed, to impress, to be something for someone else. However long they stood there, it was enough for Eric to feel the heat on his fingertips, so he quickly tossed the tobacco to the ground and stamped out the flames with his shoes. “We should head in. They want us to do our first look right now.”

Alex nodded, his hand finally slipping away from his companion’s back. “One more thing.” Eric turned to look at him, eyes flitting between the anxious biting of his lip and the way he picked his nails — anxious tells that warned him of the news before the words ever left his best man’s mouth. “..He doesn’t want me to see you anymore.”

The groom felt his heart sink, and he wondered briefly if Alex had been holding it up that whole time. “What?”

“He didn’t really want me to be in your wedding to begin with, but I told him how important this is.”

“Alex-” Desperation crept into Eric’s voice, but his best man raised his hand to silence him.

“Honestly, I agree with him. We can’t keep doing this. It’s not fair to me or Vivian.”

Anger boiled beneath the surface of his skin, but it wasn’t the white-hot rage he felt with anybody else. His blood had run cold, and he was fighting to stop his body

from shivering. “.. You’re such an asshole.”

Alex scoffed, crossing his arms. “Oh, please. You didn’t think I’d just sit around and be your side piece forever, did you?”

It all seemed to numb in a moment. What could he even say?

There were signs. They stopped spending time together ages ago, but Eric convinced himself that it was because he was caught up in wedding planning, as if he had any say among the sea of suggestions and orders from his soon to be mother-in-law.

He averted his gaze from Alex’s annoyed look, landing on the car they had spent the last decade in and out of, with more nights spent together than with his own bride.

He realized in that moment that he needed Alex more than Alex needed him. But the moment he admits that, he admits he doesn’t have any control and never has.

Eric scoffed, turning on a dime to head towards the church. “.. You’re right. Let’s go.”

He knew without looking Alex was smiling as he followed.

“I knew you’d get it.”

WHO AM I

Robert Spann

Am I a social cast “black man” set in a world that see’s my flaws before they hear my voice? My voice seems only to resonate when my flaws are being prosecuted for the sins against humanity. Am I not human? What if my voice, or my skin, or my blood held power? Could I not save a cause, or a life, or move a generation to action? My skin is not ugly, My skin is beautiful to behold, for it shimmers in the sunlight, and blends in the moonlit sky. MY mind is captivating, for what I think of myself, I shall become. I AM WONDERFULLY MADE, thoughtfully crafted, well put together. My circumstances change but do not dictate my destiny, for my destiny was created through the steps of my climb, the tears of my frustration, from the cries of a son to the adorning of my manhood. I AM BEAUTIFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE. Socially “black”, Consciously “woke”, Spiritually “Led”, Physically “ Powerful”. So when you look at me don’t remember the chains around my neck that brought me here, but the wreaths that place me at my roper place around the table. For even though fear was one of my closest companions, this very companion has moved me to act, anger has stopped being my achilles and moved to the back. Therefore my soul is watered and planted by the fountain of love, FOR I AM FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE...

Away to Now

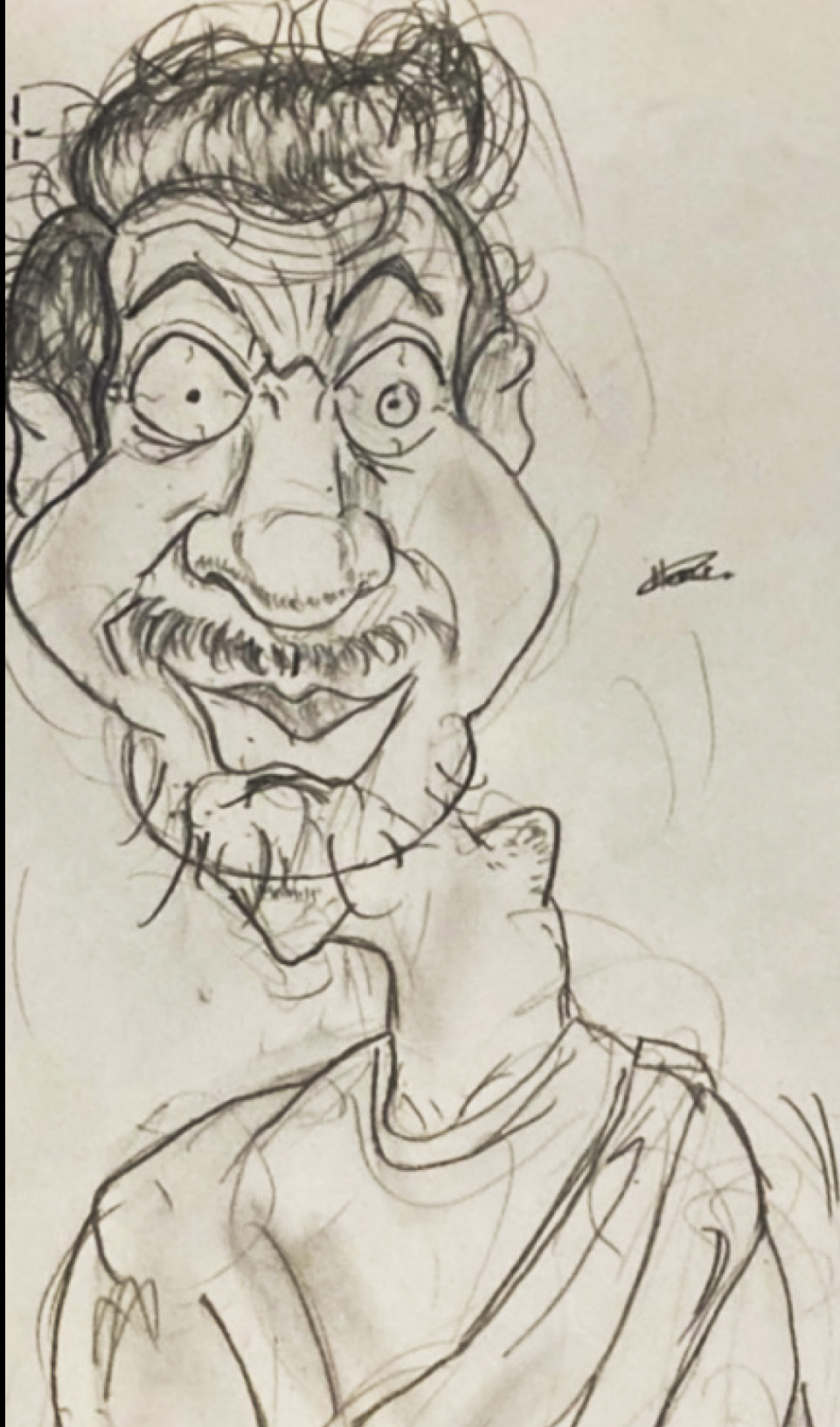
Miachel Kazmierowski

I looked at myself today without a mirror.
I saw not my reflection nor my truth.
Buried under lies, emerged a stranger I knew well.
His eyes stared out through mine,
Brought into focus—
A shadow, familiar and lost.

I looked at myself today without a mirror.
I saw a present painted with my past.
Wearing masks of fear, approached a child long forgotten.
His smile spread across my face,
Returned from darkness—
A light of distant memory.

I looked at myself today without a mirror.
I saw many things to hate, less to love.
Restrained by regret, crawled a prisoner shamed and bowed.
His tears fell wet upon my cheeks,
Lifted up to find—
A quiet joy just out of reach.

I looked at myself today without a mirror.
I saw nothing inside everything, falling away.
Absence of all things, opened a self to reveal
A mind aware of my thoughts.
Let go and nothing—
No infinite bright awareness.



Edception: Really Eddie?

Connor Shwartz

Pencil on Paper

Prison- An Educational Forum

Arnold Brown

Prison is an educational forum, if incarcerated individuals decide it to be so. I understand that education is a means of gaining useful knowledge while also discovering new ideas and challenging old ones. Therefore, I do not take lightly my student status with Southwestern College at Richard J. Donovan, Correctional Facility (RJD). Personally, an education equips me so that I can live out my childhood dream of helping people who face social problems that I, too, have faced and overcome. Education is essential if one is to afford self of present and future opportunities in our ever-evolving global community that we are a part of, yes even me and other incarcerated college students at RJD, a prison, but, also our educational forum because we decided to make it so.



Say Cheese!

Amyrey Artienda

Digital

Raguel's Revenge

R.A.S. de Ramavis

“Prostrate to my vicegerent,” As-Samad stated to us angels. We all prostrated to the mound of clay that As-Samad prepared to make his vicegerent upon the earth. All except Archangel Samael ha-Hilel that is. “What prevented you from prostrating when I commanded you?” As-Samad asked Samael ha-Hilel.

“I shall not bow to that which is made of clay for I am better than it. I am made of smokeless fire while it is made of mud,” Samael ha-Hilel haughtily replied.

“O Grieved one, be gone from my presence for it does not befit you to behave so proudly in mine presence. Surely if you preserve this arrogance, you will surely be of the despised ones.” Samael ha-Hilel turned to leave the presence of As-Samad, but he paused and spit upon the mound of clay before he walked away. I attempted to stand up to cut down my brother Samael, but Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Azrael, and Saraquel grabbed me.

“Eternal Lord, how can you allow such disobedience?” I sorrowfully asked.

“I know what you know not Raguel.” As-Samad removed the portion of the mound that was defiled by Samael's spittle and tossed it to the side. That portion formed into a four-legged creature. I pondered the words of the Eternal Lord for days. I made a vigil to watch the mound.

As I watched, I saw Samael approaching a tall four-legged creature. So I listened in carefully.

“My friend, do you see that mound over there?” Samael asked.

“Why yes O' Shining One, I see that mound over there,” the tall four-legged creature answered.

“He that sits on the Throne is going to make the mound to have dominion upon you and all your descendants. The mound will beat you, make you carry all its loads and will even ride upon your back. I would gather your mate and stampede upon that mound before that happens if I were you.” Samael beguiled. The four-legged creature gaited away and minutes later, he and his mate galloped at full speed towards the mound. When those two creatures neared the mound, the small four-legged creature rose up and began to growl and bark. This startled and scared the other two creatures making them gallop away. I laughed at the failure of Samael's scheme. As-Samad breathed his Spirit within the mound and it stood. As-Samad called the heavenly assembly before him.

“Declare unto me the names of these, if you are truthful,” As-Samad stated motioning toward all his works.

“Glory be unto you, Eternal Lord. We have no knowledge except what you have taught us. You alone are the All-Knowing, All-Wise,” we angels proclaimed.

“O’ Adam! Inform them unto their names,” As-Samad stated to the standing clay. Adam named the names of all the created works of As-Samad such as the small four-legged creature, which he called a dog, and the tall four-legged creature he called a horse. He even called each of us by our given name without us telling him. Adam named everything. “Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of the heavens and the earth which you know not and know what you declare and what you conceal. Prostrate before Adam,” As-Samad stated to us who questioned him when he decided to make for himself a reflection upon the earth. We all prostrated before Adam in obedience to the words of As-Samad but again Samael refrained and was puffed with pride. “O’ Grieved One, what hindered you that you are not amongst those who prostrated at my command?” As-Samad questioned Samael.

“I shall not debase myself by bowing to that which is made of black mud,” Samael defiantly proclaimed.

“Get out of Mine presence. My curse shall be upon you until the Day of Judgement.”

“My Eternal Lord! Grant me respite until that Day, seeing that this is the creature you have honored above me. I shall surely lead astray the progeny of this creature and show you that they do not deserve this honor for they are ungrateful,” Samael pleaded.

“Verily you are of the respited ones.”

“Now that you have given me respite, surely I shall lead astray to the path of error all except those who are your most devoted servants. I shall have them searching after vain desires, warring with one another, and I will have them blasphemously change your creation.”

“This is indeed my Decree, if any shall willingly fall into your temptation, they shall surely feed the unquenchable Hell-fire. Now be gone!” Samael left the presence of As-Samad and lurked near the Garden of Eden. As-Samad put Adam into a deep sleep and made his mate from a portion of his side. When Adam awoke, he named his mate Hawwah. As-Samad gave the couple dominion of the earth. I stayed near for I wanted to foil the schemes of my black hearted brother Samael. One day, while I was worshipping in the Heavenly Temple, there was a commotion that happened in the Garden. I appeared at the moment As-Samad spoke with Adam, Hawwah & Samael. I was enraged that I failed in my vow to protect them from Samael. “Hawwah, I did not create you from the head or the sole of Adam, you are neither superior or inferior to Adam, but you did not heed his counsel. You shall now feel the pains of childbirth and shall desire the love of Adam...Adam because you disregarded my counsel by taking the counsel of Hawwah above me, you shall now toil the soil for your food. As consequence for your choice, you shall be barred from Eden. I tell you that the Grieved One is a manifested adversary of yours. Beware for he shall tempt you, but remember now that you know right from wrong, it is your responsibility to follow the right path.”

“Eternal Lord, it was not their fault,” I protested as As-Samad exiled them out of the Garden.

“Raguel, did I not tell you that I know what you know not? I created them to have dominion over the earth. They were not meant to stay in the Garden. I removed my protection from them so that they may know that without my Spirit they shall surely fall short.” As-Samad informed me that it was a part of his plan.

“My Eternal Lord, allow me to go down to the earth to aid them against the wiles of Samael the Satan.”

“Raguel, you are an unquenchable flame, you must be

careful with your anger. You have permission to go to the Earth.”

“My Eternal Lord, I shall be careful and I shall not fail in my duty.” I descended from the heavens and reached the earth. As I landed, I saw two men in an argument. I also saw Samael with his hand upon the shoulder of one of them. I rushed forward, placed my hand upon both of them, and tried to drown out the whispers of Samael.

“O’ Raguel, you have always been one who loved to serve below others. You are too late to save Qayn the first-born of Adam for I have already gained his heart and mind. He shall kill his own brother Abel for the intense love of his beautiful twin sister which Adam betrothed to Abel.” Samael stated this as Qayn picked up a stone to strike the other man.

“Brother, I shall not lay my hand upon you. You shall have the burden of my sins upon you if you slay me,” Abel spoke to Qayn. This caused the blood of Qayn to boil and he struck his brother upon the head. Samael started laughing as he stepped away from Qayn’s side. I became so consumed in my anger that I did not notice that the brush beneath me began to flame.

“Raguel, did I not tell you to be careful with your anger?” As-Samad spoke as he stopped the flames from becoming a wildfire.

“My Eternal Lord, why did you not make my travels the same as Adam and Hawwah?”

“There must be trials and tribulations for man that they may prove themselves worthy of the honor I desire for them.”

“My Eternal Lord, how will I be able to aid the descendants of Adam, if my righteous indignation to injustice will cause a wildfire?”

“Raguel, look around you, there is a cycle that I have decreed. The bull shall eat the grass, the lion shall eat the bull, the snake shall eat the lion, and the eagle shall eat the snake. It is the circle of life. Raguel, I shall make you a vessel from the soil that has been stained with the blood of those animals.” As-Samad molded me a body like Adam, which my fiery spirit may inhabit. I entered into the vessel and made my way into the wilderness looking for Qayn the Lost One. I found Qayn walking with his pregnant twin sister Beth-‘adah and a multitude of his younger brothers and sisters. They came to a clearing and began to set up huts. I kept my distance as I watched Qayn. I wondered how I could get him back into the grace of the Eternal Lord. I watched Qayn began to build a city, which he named after his newborn twins Enoch & Malja‘ini. I placed myself into a thirteen-year meditation because I believed that I could get to Qayn through Enoch’s twin sister Malja‘ini. . .

I opened my eyes and I saw the most beautiful girl running swiftly but gracefully in front of a lion. I quickly got up and ran towards her. She stopped as I neared her but I did not see any fear upon her. I stepped in front of her and let out a ferocious roar that covered the lion before me. “How did you do that?” she asked.

“The Eternal Lord has blessed me.” I turned towards her.

“The Eternal Lord, are you one of my grandfather Adam’s favored sons?”

“No, I am one of Eternal Lord’s Archangels. You say that you are Adam’s granddaughter, what is your name and the name of your father?”

“I am Malja‘ini Bath-Qayn Roshben Adam. What is your name?”

“I am Raguel Ha-Roshnakem and my mission is to get your father Qayn back into favor with the Eternal Lord.

Lead me to your city for it is through you that your father's line shall be blessed." Malja'ini led me to the city of her father. When we got to her father's palace, I dismissed her as I requested to speak with Patriarch Qayn.

"Our Father said come in," the guard at the door stated. I walked into Qayn's presence with the aura of my angelic light. I stood with my arms across my chest.

"Who are you that you fear not the consequences of disregarding the customs of my kingdom?" Qayn asked.

"I am the one who shall lead you to the favor of the Eternal Lord. You are the first born of Adam Beniel. You shall return to the Eternal Lord to receive the honor that you deserve."

"Who are you that you believe to give me that which was taken when I shed the blood of my brother Abel?"

"I am the one who saw that it was the whispers of Satan that beguiled you like he beguiled your parents. The Eternal Lord forgave your parents when they repented. He will also forgive you if you sincerely turn to him in repentance."

"Who are you that you have the audacity to speak of what El Shaddai will do?"

"I am Raguel the Chief Angel of Vengeance; I am one of the seven Holy heavenly hosts. If the Eternal Lord did not want you to turn to him in repentance, he would have sent me to destroy everything that you built, but he did not."

"The Eternal has told me that I shall be killed in the seventh generation. That is the promised punishment for the fratricide I committed. Will my repentance nullify that?"

"No. Your repentance shall not nullify your destiny; however, if you repent, your bloodline shall be an example

to the hopeless wayward that shall regret being beguiled by the whispers of Satan."

"I have repented in my heart but my parent have given my rights to my younger better Seth."

"Yes, they have forgotten that they once have been beguiled by Satan but the Eternal Lord has not forgotten. While Seth will have a male descend who will be pure, you will have a female descendant who will be pure and the both of them will be the parents of those who will populate the new refreshed earth. Therefore, I ask you for the hand of your daughter Malja'ini. For truly she is the refuge of your bloodline."

"You would honor me by marrying my daughter?"

"Yes. For when my fiery seed takes refuge within her womb, she will give birth to the mother of your descendant's wife. They shall be the parents of your pure female descendant."

"I will give my precious Malja'ini to you if she consents to such a proposal. Enoch, tell your sister I request her presence." Enoch left and came back with Malja'ini. "Gaili, this noble spirit has asked for your hand in marriage. Do you accept this proposal?"

"My dear father, if it be your will then I accept." Malja'ini kneeled before Qayn.

"Then it is complete. We shall feast for seven days," Qayn proclaimed. On the seventh day, Qayn made a speech in front of his whole kingdom. He repented to The Eternal Lord and advised his people to do the same. As everyone prostrated, a dove came from the sky with an olive branch in its beak. I knew that As-Samad had accepted their repentance...

Malja'ini and I gave birth to Zillah. Zillah married the thrice-great grandson of Qayn, Lamech ben Methushael

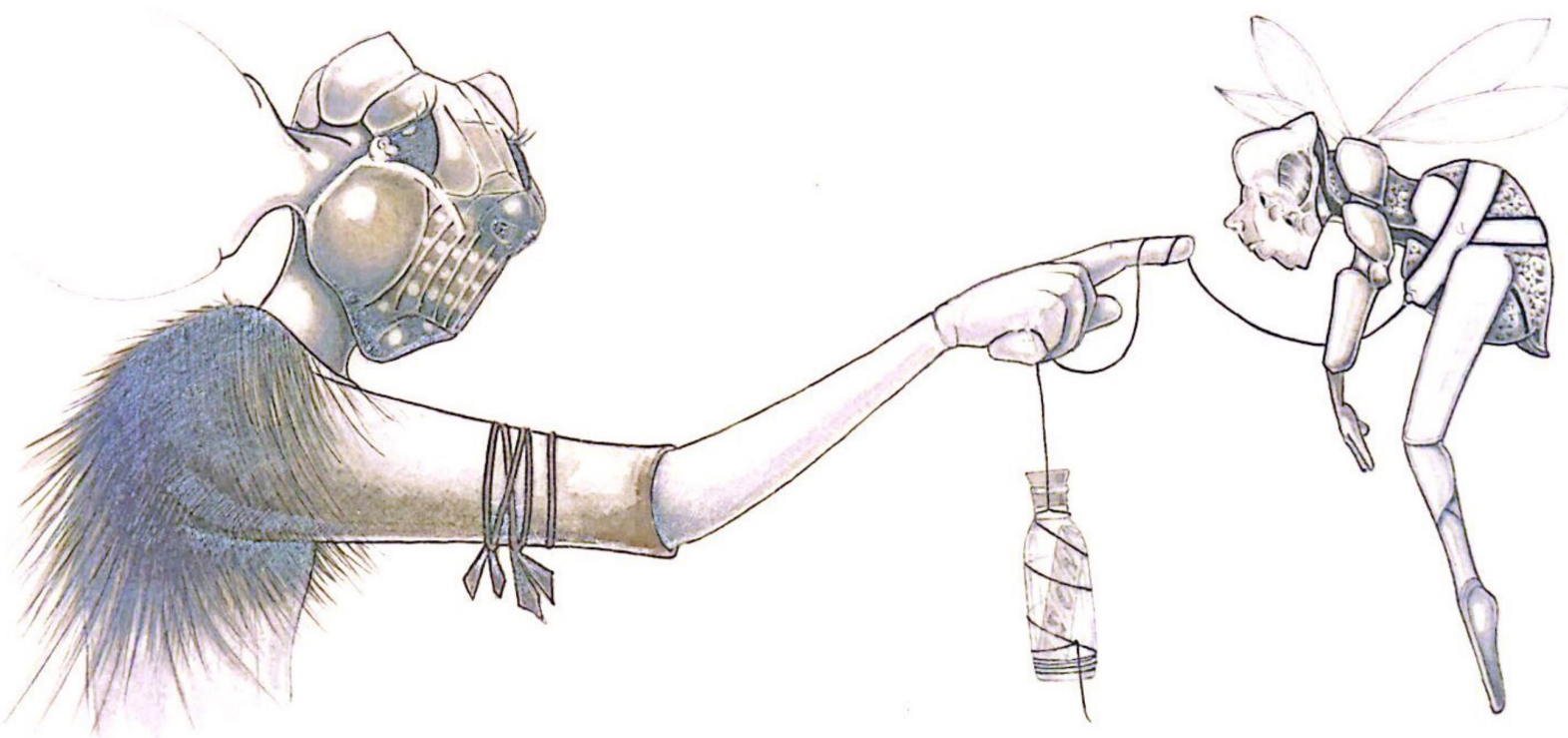
ben Mehujael ben 'Erad ben Enoch ben Qayn Roshben Adam Beniel. Those two became the parent of Tubal-Qayn and Naamah. Naamah became the wife of Noah ben Lamech ben Methuselah ben Enoch ben Yared ben Mahalalel ben Qainan ben Enosh ben Seth ben Adam Beniel. I rejoiced when the Eternal Lord used a flood to clear the earth of the wickedness sowed by Samael and his rebels.

The Begining Part I

"Please take this message and find my son."

Sean Scanlan

Illustration



Doing Time

Michael Kazmierowski

There is time for work, time for play,
A time to stand up and times to walk away.
Time of war, times of peace,
Times to listen and a time to speak.

There is this time, that time, next time,
And this is the last time.
There is summertime, wintertime,
Time springs forward, and time falls back.

There is your time, my time,
And our time.
A time for change, times change,
And time changes.

There are good times, bad times,
And time in between.
A little time, a lot of time,
But no time like the present.

There is extra time and plenty of time,
But never enough time.
You can think back in time, Look back at old times,
But there is no getting time back.

Time can be spent, time can be saved,
But never bought or sold.
There is free time, time is money,
And time should not be wasted, but often is.

There is a dawn of time,
Span of time, the end of time,
And it is just a matter of time,
Until you are out of time.

Time slips by, goes by,
And time can pass you by,
So you should make time for others,
And take time for yourself.

There is time to hurry, time to slow down,
Time to go, and a time to stop.
Time crawls by, flies by,
Time stands still, and time runs out.

There is daytime, nighttime, naptime,
Time to wake up, and time to go to sleep.
Break time, lunchtime, quitting time,
And time off, because we all need time to rest.

There is all of the time, none of the time,
And sometimes.
There is game time, halftime,
And timeout.

You can tell the time, but time won't listen.
And, time waits for no one.
You can pass the time, but watch the time—
So you don't lose track of time.

Because, you can wish for more time
When your time comes,
But that is all the time there is.

Michael Kazmierowski

And then,
Your time
Is up!

Wise Man

J Asimovic

CHARACTERS- SLOBODAN – wise / calm / humble

BARTHOLOMEW – simple peasant / curious / lacks wisdom but hungers for knowledge

SETTING- A collapsed underground cave, thousands of years past.

AT RISE- A cave was discovered by villagers during an exploration expedition for resources and food. The cave was spotted outside of the community and so several men decided to inspect it for resources and determine if it was stable/safe. It collapsed on them while they were in it, trapping them unexpectedly.

BARTHOLOMEW: Oh curse this disaster! We are destined for death! Our future is doomed if we are to remain trapped in this cave! (*notices slobodan is calm*) But who is this man, who seems not to share in our despair, he instead appears peaceful and content! I must inquire...Excuse me, sir? How do you maintain your brilliance in such dark times?

SLOBODAN: I know this physical environment does not define me.

BARTHOLOMEW: But surely the darkness consumes you as it does us all.

SLOBODAN: Yet light lies on my horizon.

BARTHOLOMEW: (*dismissively laughs*) You are but a fool.

SLOBODAN: If a man finds an oasis by maintaining hope while stranded in the desert, is he yet a fool?

BARTHOLOMEW: By what oasis shall we quench our arid faith, brother?

SLOBODAN: Come, I wish to show you something. *(they move to a nearby water pool slobodan points down and follows path of stream into pool)* Do you see this small stream which drains into this large pool?

BARTHOLOMEW: Aye

SLOBODAN: Well, it is our beliefs and views, like this small stream, that pour into the pool of our lives and fill our thoughts and actions with meaning. *(picks up dirt handful and lets it slip into the stream)* And look what happens when I fall some earth into the stream.

BARTHOLOMEW: Aye, the pool eventually will muddy.

SLOBODAN: And so, your past flaws must not control your present or future, it is up to us whether we wish to live as a clear, well-ordered pool fit for drinking, or....

BARTHOLOMEW:as a mud-pit full of muck and indecision!—I see, so we must be aware of our actions in the present!

SLOBODAN: Yes, you understand. Now, tell me... do you feel pain, sir?

BARTHOLOMEW: Why, how can I not?—I am stranded in a cave!—I may not see my family for many a moon cycle.

SLOBODAN: Are affairs with your family in good order?

BARTHOLOMEW: If I am honest sir, nay, for I disagreed with my wife recently, and neglected my son in a moment of need.

SLOBODAN: Aha! Your decisions plague you, and not the present constraints of this cave.

BARTHOLOMEW: How can these past situations torment me? They are but a memory!

SLOBODAN: It is mankind's misfortune—to be beset by a past which goes unresolved.

BARTHOLOMEW: But how can I correct a lost moment? How can I appeal to my love from within a cave!?

SLOBODAN: You are already doing so, if I may enlighten you.

BARTHOLOMEW: Please.

SLOBODAN: Are you now not aware of this misdeed against your family?

BARTHOLOMEW: Why yes, now I am.

SLOBODAN: Look into this pool here.

BARTHOLOMEW: I do not see how this could possibly...*(Bartholomew investigates the pool)* oh wow, I can see myself!

SLOBODAN: So is your ability to look at yourself from within. Ever present is your opportunity to, shall we say, self-reflect?

BARTHOLOMEW: Whoa! I have not had such thoughts in previous days!

SLOBODAN: *(proudly laughs)* This is apparent, my friend. And now you shall benefit from this wisdom for all your days. No manner of damage you cause shall diminish this truth. For you now have a special power, mindfulness.

BARTHOLOMEW: I am most grateful, but alas, knowing of my past grants me no relief. I may now be tortured by this reminder.

SLOBODAN: Do you mean to tell me that now armed with mindful awareness you shall commit the same trespasses against your beloved family once more?

BARTHOLOMEW: NAY! Never shall I inflict such pains again, not with this—awareness. This new thinking awakens me to my past, and it shall guide me through the minefield of the future!

SLOBODAN: You are quite wise, my friend.

BARTHOLOMEW: Please share more of your wealth with me, oh Wise Man!

SLOBODAN: This wealth is yours, yet I wish to remind you that such a bounty is to be shared.

BARTHOLOMEW: Yes Sir! A feast for all! Indeed!

SLOBODAN: Now a lesson from the animal kingdom.—See here the mouse and how he digs, always sure of his mission? So goes for what drives man; without purpose in life, we are adrift in a sea of uncertainty. Purpose will drive a man to achieve heights never imagined.

BARTHOLOMEW: But how shall I draw a path to connect my life to my dreams?

SLOBODAN: My friend, let not the path concern you. Pursue your goals with honest purpose and your route shall remain true.

BARTHOLOMEW: I shall henceforth bear in mind this important lesson. Thank you, wise teacher. What now will this wondrous cave teach us?

SLOBODAN: (*slobodan begins to walk near a wall shimmering with gold*) Witness this wall and how it shimmers.—But now step aside, and tell me what you see?

BARTHOLOMEW: What magic is this!? The splendor has faded!

SLOBODAN: An illusion from fine metals in the cave walls, but it can be seen from only a specific viewpoint.—This ability to change how we view the cave wall is known as perspective. Just as we can step about to see, or not see, the gold sparkling, we can change our perspective when thinking on any of life's situations.

BARTHOLOMEW: ...and to what end would one benefit from this?

SLOBODAN: For the purpose of making thoughtful decisions as we now know how muddy our waters can become without mindful decision.—We are complex beings, with many ideas and feelings, would you agree?

BARTHOLOMEW: Of course, I myself have held countless thoughts, and my young son, he seems to encounter a new emotion with every new moment!

SLOBODAN: Would you agree that some ideas sparkle, some ideas are dull, and not all moods are suitable for all of life's circumstances?—Now then, we use thoughtful perspective to measure the idea and emotion best fit for any given situation.

BARTHOLOMEW: With a wide gaze, my choices narrow! Decisions are now clear! This new talent shall certainly prove

useful. (*notices ants on the ground*) Pesky ants! Nasty little creatures. Useless they are, no lessons to be learned from them!

SLOBODAN: Do not be so hasty in your charge, there is one final lesson here.—We are so consumed with our personal lives we oftentimes lose sight of this basic truth—keep in mind the value of one another and the benefit of togetherness.—Observe that no single ant will stray far from the path of his fellow, for the tiny ant is ever committed to its community and understands its role in the team. One ant alone is weak, but organized they are a mighty force.

BARTHOLOMEW: I can testify to the strength of assembly. I have seen teamwork propel society to new heights.—I wonder, can we harness the power of many to free us from the condemnation of this cave!?

SLOBODAN: There is hope in your idea, my friend. How do you suppose we succeed?

BARTHOLOMEW: If I combine all the wisdom you have imparted on me, I can clearly grasp a way to our salvation!—Let us first return to this pool of water, where you created mud, which methinks can be used to create an earthen step to reach the collapsed cave entrance.—Next we shall explore the shimmering walls. We shall excavate some of the fine metals and form a shovel and axe—tools to dig through the collapsed rubble!

SLOBODAN: ...why, you sound as sure of your mission as....

BARTHOLOMEW: The MOUSE! OF COURSE! YES! May his determination inspire US to complete our task!

SLOBODAN: You say... us ?

BARTHOLOMEW: Yes! Us! Surely, we must work together, as the ant colony has taught us—we can do so much more with many hands toiling toward the same goal. And with all our efforts combined, we shall realize our salvation soon enough!

SLOBODAN: Amazing, my friend. You have gathered all your learned insight and now you shall use this wisdom to set us free! Come, let us gather our fellow captives and tell them of their rescue! Praise be to the WISE MAN!

BARTHOLOMEW: WISE MAN !? Do you really think I am worthy of such a title?

SLOBODAN: You have proven your wisdom to me, and to all you shall set free!

END

I Was Before George Floyd

Arnold Brown

Before there was George Floyd

I was

shackled and shoved
into the bilge of slave ships
and brought across a great sea.

Before there was George Floyd

I was

sold on an auction block
like a piece of meat;
but, when Jim Crow came

I was

hung from tree for all to see.

Before there was George Floyd

I was

a Choctaw, a Seminole and on the forced walk of the Cherokee;

I was

in the Black Hawk War and the Mexican War, too;
What was this, some sort of “manifest desti[*knee*]”?

Before there was George Floyd

I was

Emmet, Malcom and Ali.

Before there was George Floyd I was.

Baby Panther

Alexis Ramos

Andrew.

home is the canyon before us, children expired—dewy & dying—tired and trying, now we're shedding scabbed skin sunk from old cocoons & crumbling onto growing remains. we'd trespassed our elementary school, older, our big bums sat on that red slide, guts stayed silly-puttied, tourist-trapped in developing bodies— reminiscing Elmer's glue-unsticking to inexperienced, itty-bitty hands.

home is the graffiti-ed bridge by Pepper Park, soul twins trekked side quests—skipping rocks n' boomeranged stingrays back safely to their sea, where we'd realize sonder held no bounds. beckon home to our backyard's beheaded bonsai tree, perhaps elderberry bushes clustered, partnered to California Buckwheat's taco-shaped leaves. sturdy as can be, home is your shade of brown, other hues abstract to me. underneath, i'd hope your ribcage be built like mine—uncaged

—so your unhealed bruises can heal, as mine do. since our fingers fill out daunting documents, every drop of knowledge involves muscle memory—how to stay alive, the strife, the stakes, sandpapered soles staked to shoes tied together without sleep, trotting, tripped on cement, stalking dreams of running away from the house, that place. home trails an invisible string, sacred, taped to your trace: the ground, your timbre, the tan echoing your beautiful, ever-so-aging face.

Azure Eyes

Amyrey Artienda

Digital



Truth and Lies

Aaron King

“Lies” are more powerful than “truth”, for truth represents a static being where lies represent dynamic becoming. The lie is able to transcend the moment and reach into a state of overcoming. It would fain become truth. It slanders the current and past state in order to aim at a higher future state. “The truth” necessarily describes in simplest terms only what has already arrived at a state of general consensus. Lies are bolder. Lies step into a state of being that has yet to come to pass. In this way the lie shapes reality rather than submit to it. The lie is unconcerned with method, material, empirical, or otherwise. Any precondition would limit the power of the lie as such by anchoring it to a past “truth”.

The decadent human misunderstands the lie at the most fundamental level. He therefore places unnecessary weight and emphasis on the truth, believing power to reside in the deference to this ideal. This deference, by definition, marks him as a weaker animal than the man of lies. It demonstrates that he is beholden to an ideology that is not his own. Thus he is slave to it. A subordinate to a system of “truth” created by another will independent of his own.

Who are the greatest powers throughout history? The writers of the greatest lies. Humanity possesses a unique amnesia for the history of truth. They pretend to forget that every “truth” was once a “lie” inasmuch as every

great idea was enjoyed the opposition of consensus as it contradicted the predominant consensus of the time. Every significant step forward that humankind has taken has been characterized by this quality. Was not Newtown once the greatest of liars? What of Darwin, Luther, Einstein, or Marx?

Each stride forward must overcome the footprint of the past.

Some might ask: Does the lying human identify a new “truth”, inherent in nature, or do they shape nature according to their lie? But such a question misses the whole mark, and is in fact the misunderstanding that has brought the “truthful” human to ruin. It assumes a dichotomy between human and an external reality. Every truth hitherto, is a product of the interaction between a creative will of a creature that is a piece of becoming. Not an abstracted observer capable of viewing the world objectively in any sense. But an expression of that very becoming to which it belongs in creating. It forms reality as it transforms itself to better widen its grasp on power.

“The truth” is made through intersubjective consensus. No idea can be “true” that no one believes. The truth that only one person believes remains a lie. The lie becomes true precisely when it begins to be believed. It is necessary

that at least one person believe his lie before it can pass through consensus. The greatest powers thus learn to believe their own lies, or at least feign belief to the degree that they inspire truth to grow in others.

Truth is as an infection that spreads throughout the population. The only limit on its growth is the presence of competing truths. The power of the adherents to a truth can vary according to the strength of a truth: its intoxicating power.

The scientist will argue that the truth is seldom intoxicating, that it is a banal thing that focuses on the tiniest details that would otherwise bore the psyche. But the scientist forgets that research does not exist in a vacuum. That the intoxicating effect scientific work is not measured by the number of people that believe it, but the increase in power that it affects in its master. For every scientist is the servant to a greater power, unless he himself is both the creative power and the researcher. Whether it be technology consumed by the masses, weapons for the powerful, or information that furthers “the truth” of a party, the scientist slaves for a master. Perhaps it is better to say not that the scientist forgets that he does not work in a vacuum, but that she pretends. The effects of cognitive biases are well documented, and exist in the common body of knowledge that informs the scientist’s work. The honest scientist knows that she cannot escape these biases, yet she convinces herself that the service to truth requires that she work against them. So how does the scientist combat these biases? Through consensus. The irony!

It must be addressed that the “common” truths are still necessarily a product of consensus. If one asks after the effects of gravity, one first trust’s one’s own experience. But how does one confirm this belief without resorting to consensus? For instance, to know that the effect was not singular to ones individual experience would require not only to observe that the effect on other’s but to con-

firm with them that they are subject to it. Does one know that the mountain does not choose to remain on the earth, or does one simply assume that it is under the tyranny of gravity because that is what consensus has taught us? We can really only say with clean conscience that from experience, we have seen and felt an effect of the Earth pulling us down that we describe as gravity.

The distinguishing feature of humanity is the ability to lie. If other animals do lie, it is not with the grandiosity and complexity that the human lies. The animal for instance, can report on an experience to other animals, but it does not construct an abstract to explain that experience in terms of an overlaying narrative structure. The human lie grew through the advancement of language, ritual, mythology, belief, and now theory. It became more than dishonesty. Humans could classify, organize, and contextualize all knowledge of experience as narrative. It became more than instinct – it became abstract to the point of being removed from all experience.

The modern scientist acknowledges the fluctuating nature of theory. The theory, like the myth, is a fluid concept. It can always be amended, updated, or even refuted completely as “new knowledge is acquired”. In other word, it assumes, in effect, that becoming is dynamic – that being is impossible to capture, and that reality is practically infinite in relation to human experience. The human psyche thus found a means to adopt a system that allowed for the pursuit of functional knowledge under a framework that is presumptive of change and becoming while maintaining the fiction that being is a static reality that we can strive after. Lies are allowed to become truth, but only after the greatest scrutiny and resistance of consensus.

No doubt you will oppose me: “But the truth exists independent of a believer! It is a state of reality whether acknowledged or unacknowledged. At minimum, it requires only the belief by one, and not consensus. One that pos-

esses the truth need not seek its affirmation in another.” This after all, is the nature of secrets. But here perhaps we stumble upon the motivation for the impulse to reveal a secret. Kept to ourselves, are we sure really that it exists? And it may even be that we hope that by keeping it secret, it is in effect as if it had never happened. We may even allow it to slip out of consciousness, and repress it to the realm of the unconscious, where, even if it wells up again it will be in a distorted form that is unrecognizable and distinct from the original. To admit our secret to another admits it to the consensus of reality, a consensual reality that we must thereafter confront.

Creation-destruction is more succinctly termed “becoming” or “change”. Lies describe the quality of becoming. They vary in strength from an interpretation of the past to an interpretation of the future. In their passive state, they automatically interpret the stream of presence through the autonomic functions of the body. Consciousness empowers the mind to formulate images as future and past state lies. These images henceforward become memory through integration. So the process of memory is not passive but active. Only filtered sensory input occurs out of consciousness. Consciousness expresses the (derivative) byproduct output of active integration of memory. It represents the cycling of sensory input through various instincts, emotions, and attempts at logic. The competition between these forces produces a behavior as well as conscious “images” as expressed by Damasio.

The unnatural adoption of the “objective” scientific view of the world, though powerful in its practical applications to technology has been overstated in its ability to determine the direction of becoming. The deference and reliance on numbers has grounded reality in a Platonic state of perception.

In the absence of God, morality, “truth”, free will, causality, and the soul, what does it mean to be human?

Does an ever-lasting life open the door to the realization of meaninglessness, as the world unfolds in stark disregard for the irrelevant Homo sapiens? Does the species evolve beyond the need for meaning?

Nietzsche’s test of strength: To live without need for the handicap of ideologies. To abandon all Gods and the shadows of. To forsake all master’s and false idols. To be one with the animal that is human. To lose the instinct to think in dialectic terms. To lose faith in the conscious experience and embrace the unconscious again. To live not in the universe of words but of images. To make the images of our minds realities. To imprint creation with our own image and remake it to conform to our narrative.

To suspend judgement of the analytic mind and allow a flow of images to dictate action, seamlessly. To let no hesitation stand between thought and movement. To let thought itself even cease. To be thoughtless. To become machines. Human machines. Unbounded by the limits of logic impressed on those of silicone and steel. Un-ruled by emotion, but tethered to it. To let emotion become our drive. To whip them. To become their master. Not to let them master us.

Images, the pure states of mind. The unaltered, unrestrained, uncorrupted by interpretation. Pure will.

Pluviophile

Suhmuntu

My mind does not know how to feel with rain
I'd stay inside and would admire Her song
But You were truly part of Her Domain
Inviting me to come and sing along.

The calm and constant melody repeats,
The sound would now forever haunt my sleep.
The song is sweet but poison it secretes.
The rain proceeds to sing, to moan, to weep.

We danced, I twirled, you held my body close
Until I slipped and fell onto the ground.
The raindrops on my skin, a lethal dose
Absorb enough and then it's you who'll drown.

To love, to hate, to kiss, and live or die
Oh how I'd loathe to see you say good-bye.

I

Michael Kazmierowski

A fallen leaf blown
On a wind of change never
Looks back at the tree

Adam's Heir

R.A.S. de Ramavis

Visionary wise man
Had this realization when I put everything in God's hand
Kept prayer for a sense of peace around the world
That inner voice said, "You want peace, you must Persecute Evil and Cultivate Equality around the world"
I questioned back "What gives me the right?"
"Wasn't you told the answer is in the Light?"
So I studied scriptures late into the night
And before breakfast had a profound new insight
I'm a Divine Being
Not a god 'cause I ain't the Supreme Being
What I'm saying I reached the rank just above the angelic beings
It's possible, who bowed to Adam? The angelic beings
Why was I blessed amongst the angels, 'cause he was one of the Archangels
So becoming divine was my destiny 'cause Granny named me after an Archangel
Raphael, which means God has healed
And it's the truth 'cause all my sins have been repealed
But all my life I never wanted to be the king
I just wanted to be the man that made the king
Now I guess I gotta step up and claim the throne
Praying for God's aid 'cause I can't do it alone
I'm sick of the injustice, the damn oppression
And the fake Muslims giving the world the wrong impression
Plus the wicked running around like free range hens
Corrupting the minds of the tiny little children
This a call to arms for the God-loving men
'cause letting evil go unchecked is a major sin
Citizen of no nation, I'm a Theocosmopolitan
I don't care if you Muslim, Jew, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, or Zoroastrian
Deep studying, I know they all pieces to the puzzle of the same religion

It was not God, it was man who caused all the division
And you might not believe me but I saw it in a vision
I'm the one who gonna put an end to all this Goddamned division
So I'm coming for you if you oppress my people
Not just the blacks, I'm talking about all people
I want peace but I'm prepared to go to war
'cause God and Humanity is what I'm fighting for
Martin had a dream
Malik said get it by all means
Mao showed me how to win the Revolution
Muammar had the Greenprint but lacked, the proper execution
Fresh out of prison, Mandela led a nation
I'm destined to lead the world, I seen it like Final Destination
I'm the Emperor, servant of the Supreme Being
Who made me Guardian and Protector of all human beings
His Divine Trustee with guaranteed victory
An unstoppable force that you ain't never seen in history
There's only been men who ruled the known world
Never one with dominion over the whole world

Roadkill

Abel Escobedo

There is this dog I see daily on the road to my house,
And our eyes, peer into him, scraping into its skull
Not allowing its corpse to rest, as it never could in life.

I am a dog on the street, in a dark, clouded night
But it cannot be helped, nor can it be rearranged.

I drive through him, not by, but right through
Cementing him further into the road,
Its bones no longer cracking
There is no sound at all.
Its cries no longer muffled,
Under his broken, flattened snout.

And how did he feel the moments prior to death?
Did it wish it would not happen?
Or did he wish the process to be faster?

And I'm sure at that moment, he forgot how to scream.
Because he never once did,
Not when his skin was stretched beyond recognition,
And not before that.

And the moment he did, we all saw it as lie,
Its pain ignored and dismissed.
A melody to accompany death.

And I'm sure that this dog,
with its organs in sight,
with its back legs crushed
multiple times.
Did also feel, then, a sense of relief.

Had he finally escaped from unforgiving prayers?
Had he then realized, just how feeble it was,
Just how pointless it was to have tried to escape,
And how that same escape had led him to this.

But it was not an escape,
It was the seeking of truth.
Truth that according to others,
Could not be fulfilled.

And had you been him too, then you would understand.
That it had never been worse,
Nor can it heal on its own.

And I'm sure that this dog, in its bed of despair,
Was fine then, with the idea of dying.
For it knew then that death,
would have been the only wish of his
to have ever come true.

I am driving again,
And again, and again.
I am driving, I drive.
Through the dog on the road,
Not by, but right through.
As I flatten him further,
Thinning him, dried.

Yet regardless of it,
We are here with it too.

And what if the day
that his worries collapsed,
he had failed to be happy.
Had he failed to be free?

Had it realized then,
In his bed of despair,
it had drowned in its lie
Way before he was dead?
Had he then succumbed
to everything they had said?
Every gash in its soul
that could not truly heal.

And what happened to it,
Did it cease to exist,
or is it stuck there forever,
in an endless existence of pain.
One that was granted by death.

Eternal life as the last thing it felt.
And if so, does he still feel us now?
Pressing him further
on the place it last lived?
Making sure it won't ever rest.
Leaving it to wait in the fire it died.

A Vast Expanse

Suhmuntu

The little girl, putting on a brave face, failed at holding her tears back as her parents soothed her. The signal light above the port door was green. Savoring the scent of her father and the sweetness of her mother's kisses, the young girl slowly brought herself to let go of the two most important and only people in her world.

“My love, we'll be back as soon as we can. We're going to report our findings to Z-tech and come straight back to you,” Mom said. “Or in case the mission ceases, we'll get you and bring you to the surface with us,” Dad added. The child sniffled and nodded obediently.

“Okay, I'll be here,” she croaks. Her parents stand back up, towering over the small figure and grab their cases of research. Mom and Dad step through the airlock as it closes behind them. With a click and a whoosh of escaping pressure, the submarine capsule detached from the Bubble. The girl ran to the side of the craft's main window to watch the capsule's light fade into the darkness of the water as it began its ascent. The scientists' daughter was suddenly left at the bottom of the ocean all by herself.

§

Darting from planet to planet was the young research prodigy, intent on completing his mission to find the floating mass which would be the first future human colony in

space. But years of space travel, innovating, and countless awards has taken a toll on the boy's health. Allen, the son of the famed astronomer family to win a Nobel Prize, had been accredited for the solution to Earth's healing. By Allen's taking on the mantle of head researcher, the Talina parents have gone into retirement back on Earth where half of the population had already moved away to space colonies founded by them.

Taking yet another sample of dust, checking for life, and searching for any water, Allen roams the fourth planet of the week and probably the 345th in his lifetime. His readings are awless from doing these routine checks like it's as easy as breathing. There's usually an insufficient amount of consumable water that determines the capacity to house life, so he heads back to his ship to report his findings. Upon shutting the door and setting up the monitor, he sorts through the Z-Tech Institute's catalogue of planets to list the current planet he's on as unsustainable. Realizing he's not in any rush anyways, he scrolls through the past planets' catalogues.

Allen recalls writing many of these entries himself, and some he recognizes as his mother's and father's entries further back. But as Allen scrolls all the way down to the original entry, he lands on Earth. Being born in space and having no real connection to the home planet of his kind

other than learning about it through his parents' stories, Allen was naturally inclined to click on it.

Millions of documents flood the screen, ranging from experiments to yearly reports. Most of the ZTI projects were completed decades ago since humans recently started to leave Earth for new colonies. Except there seems to be one folder labeled as ongoing, titled "Depths." Clicking on the folder led to opening a project synopsis on the ocean's deepest waters. Allen studies planetary water, but he has never seen such vivid life in it as he observing on his screen. The purpose of the mission was to search for undiscovered creatures, and it started thirty years ago.

Allen reads that the project was started by the Namara family, a couple whose passion was to preserve the sacredness of the ocean by observing some of the rarest sea creatures and environment of the deep. Never been able to go to a beach in his life, Allen searches on. He pores over each update on every oceanic zone as their submersible craft descended. After a decade's worth of study, the entries halted before resuming two years later. Allen's head tilted upon reading the following entry. The wording was a bit unprofessional, sounding casual, and much less detailed. He continued anyways, still intrigued by the newer and newer findings. However, instead of mentioning a partner, the entries spoke narratively as solo missions like diary entries. The boy, puzzled and trying to make sense of the monologues, receives an update on the Depths study. His eyes lit up, scrolling to the top of the catalogue list, realizing that the update is from today. Perhaps he could ask the Namara family about their findings...

Allen logs into his father's account with Z-Tech. He has had practice talking to fellow scientists in professional settings, especially excited to sit in during his parents' meetings when he was a young boy. Landing on the Namara family's ship radio, Allen makes the call.

§

Reaching the airlock once again, Maribel steps through and runs the drain system as she takes off her suit. The water captured in the airlock then gets filtered through the machinery to use throughout the ship later. Maribel contemplates between taking a shower, a nap, or logging in her findings right away. She grabs a bag of shrimp chips and sits down at her desk. Groaning, she stares at the tall screen, the text box empty.

Slowly beginning to type and rewatching the footage from her body camera, Maribel transcribes her new route and attempts to provide names for the newly discovered shark she had stumbled upon. Other than "Gerald" or "Bobby," Maribel could not think of any real scientific name she could label it as. But then again, nobody was reading her entries. Finalizing the new shark's name as "Petruccio" and submitting the journal entry into the ZTI database, Maribel steps back from the computer to relax.

Waddling over to the artificial garden in the back, she checks up on her plants with hopes to pluck some berries or vegetables to cook tonight. Her attempt at farming was never as good as father's and the dishes she made were never as good as mother's. Their recipes compiled in the wall of books on the shelf were hard to locate among the stacks of research essays. Maribel could finally reach the top shelf, but never dared to peek inside their personal journals. Figuring that the shrimp chips would be a sufficient dinner, the young lady plops down on her bed and plays the CD track from when her family first ventured down into the oceanic abyss.

As soon as her eyes began to shut, an unfamiliar alarm came from her computer. Her Z-Tech subcraft was old, but never broke. So what was causing this malfunction? Maribel races downstairs to the main computer which spanned the width of the entire wall, greeted by a message that

Z-Tech was calling her. Nervous and unprepared, Maribel's hand hovered over the button to answer. Even if she is just in her pajamas, it doesn't matter. Her parents were finally going to—

A young boy's face appeared on the screen.

Maribel froze.

The boy's face flushed.

Not willing to let this opportunity go, Maribel speaks up.

"H-hello? Are you from Z-Tech?" she asks gently.

The boy slowly nods in reply. "Yes, I am. I'm Allen Talina. I've been reading everything about you." He instantly regrets his phrasing. "I meant—I've been reading about your research. Are you Mrs. Moira Namara?" Allen asks, despite gauging that this girl was only about twenty.

"Ah, uh, no. I'm Maribel. Moira is my mother's name. I thought she'd be—" Maribel trailed off. "Uh, why are you calling?" Maribel began to reach for a robe.

"Oh, well I was just wanting to ask about your experiments and research and whatnot..." Allen wasn't usually this nervous to talk to someone. Being a solo adventurer, he was typically ecstatic to meet someone new. This time around, he can hardly think straight.

"But if now is not a good time, we can talk another day or week or never if you want," Allen rushes.

"N-no, it's okay. I...haven't talked to anyone in a while." Maribel admits. "What would you like to know?" Allen thought for a moment.

"You just updated your research. H-how did that go?" he said optimistically. Maribel cleared her throat.

"Well I set out onto the seafloor with my grappling hook to rappel down and carry a bag of tools. Although ZTI equipment doesn't break, I did notice that the durability was starting to wear down. I collected some coral samples and recorded some creature behavior. I did notice a whale carcass floating down from above that attracted many scavengers to the floor. Petruchio was particularly hungry today, so I had to reset camp twice because he was getting too close." Maribel was suddenly conscious of her rambling. "Am I talking too much? I feel like what I'm saying isn't making sense."

Allen was simply smiling as Maribel's talk was captivating yet confusing. He nodded politely. "I'd love to hear more about your work, but I'm afraid I'm not familiar with most of the terms you mentioned."

"Like what?"

"Um...what's a Petruchio?"

Maribel giggled and shook her head. Picking up her journal, she flipped to some drawings of creatures as well as bringing out some collected samples to show to the mysterious boy on the screen.

§

After an hour of video chatting, Allen realizes that he needs to get going. His alarm is going off, notifying him to prepare for another launch. As much as he would rather keep talking, he has a duty to fulfill. Allen logs off and takes his time looking out at the terrain surrounding his ship: lifeless and cold. With a hand on the window, he points at the distant lights in the sky guessing at where Earth might be.

He shakes off the contemplative state to redirect his focus to launch protocols. He double checks all of his ship's equipment. Suited for pretty much any emergency, the ship remains stable as the engine roared once more.

The ship was aimed for the next planet rumored to have water, AMR-03 which is approximately a five-hour flight away. Allen's spacecraft sets off into space once more, as the boy decides on what to do during his trip.

He knew that attempting to call her during his flight would be unstable and irresponsible. No distracted pilot ever lands, he recalled his father's teaching. However, his connection to Maribel left him itching, wondering more about Earth's ocean. The pictures and footage that she showed him were fascinating, terrifying, and exotic. She sent him an album from the past year that he decided to look through on his Techplate. Allen swiped across the photos of animals that were translucent, spiny, bioluminescent, toothy, and flowy. Maribel had explained to him that her ZTI suit and Bubble were built to sustain pressure in the same way his suit and rocket were too. He wondered how she managed to cope with her loneliness down there. Allen's thoughts were interrupted by the alert for an impending asteroid collision.

Having done this a million times, the young astronaut reached for the emergency thruster lever to steer clear of the obstacle and continue his course. He remained alert for any more debris until he landed again on planet AMR-03. Like an excited puppy waiting for its owner to return, Allen quickly messages Maribel if she was able to call again. She agrees immediately and calls him, connecting the two explorers once more. Allen answers on his Techplate, fully aware of his mission priority to scour the new planet's landscape, but is determined to show Maribel his view.

Eating a bowl of cereal made from her artificially-grown potatoes, Maribel watches the stream as Allen demonstrates the use of his different gadgets. Since it was his turn to show off his equipment, Maribel eagerly soaked in all of his explanations.

"And this is where I park the rover. It can track my

footsteps and take the test tubes that I hand it to see if the vegetation, water, or air samples are suitable for people. The further the destination, the more expensive the trip is though, so I stay within the Milky Way Galaxy. I'm not allowed into other galaxies for fear that I may lose connection to Earth." Allen resumed his trekking through the planet's tough weather conditions, while trying to keep an optimistic smile for his audience.

"Do you mean that ZTI can't track you if you leave this galaxy? I'm sure that there's gotta be some exciting things to see beyond our—"

"My...parents don't want me going too far."

Maribel chokes on her potato-cereal. "Your parents are still in contact with you?" Allen nods and sighs, knowing this topic would come up eventually.

"Yes, as the last Talina up in space, I have to maintain a good image for them back on Earth. That's why I have to keep up the mission."

"Allen...you're really lucky. I wish I knew how my parents were doing." Maribel's interest in Allen's mission turned to jealousy.

"What do you mean, Mari?" Allen was still occupied, and not quite paying full attention to her quivering voice.

"You—" Maribel's tears start to stream down her face. "I'm not supposed to be here. You're willingly jumping from planet to planet, straying further and further away from your family. Meanwhile, I'm stuck here because my parents probably forgot about me." As if this were the first time Maribel was admitting this out loud, she continued to cry into the mic. Her sobbing was drowned out by Allen's worry.

"Hey, hey, um, don't...cry..." Allen never knew how to comfort someone before. "I wish I could find out where

your parents are. Maybe ZTI lost track of your ship and they can't find you. Have you tried returning to the surface yourself?"

"N-no. They promised to come back for me."

"Well then that's it. It's been way too long and you need to get some fresh air yourself. I can maybe guide you up. The schematics of your ship are similarly formatted as mine." Allen assured. He halted his research and sat down on the rover to watch Mari follow his instructions.

The young lady wiped her tears away, a bit sluggish as a child would be, but she drank some filtered water to face her fear. Standing up from her desk, Maribel cautiously approached the Bubble's control panel. Allen pointed out different gears that Mari had never dared to touch since there was no point in moving the ship before.

"Raise the anchor and detach from the seafloor," the boy guided calmly. "Turn on the thrusters by pulling the levers up slowly."

With a new resolve, Mari precisely maneuvered her vessel off the ground. She chuckled to herself in awe and thankfulness. The world above her was just in reach, knowing that she'd reunite with her family soon. Allen was also cheering her on, even though he was solar systems apart from his girl who captured his heart.

The Bubble's ascent gave the impression of being smooth sailing, but rocks began to materialize and sea creatures were starting to bump into the craft in various directions. Allen grew worried. This was not like his many experiences with dodging space debris because he was not in control. A loud crash and a major impact turned the Bubble around. Alarms were blaring and Mari was hyper-ventilating. The Bubble was certainly sinking.

"Mari, can you still hear me? I need you to stay calm

and locate the emergency thrusters."

"Wha-? Huh?"

"Listen to me, look for the—" Allen could see in Maribel's eyes that she was not going to make it. Her distressed state was going to deplete her oxygen faster than the ship could replenish it. Looking around himself, there were only faint traces of life along the grey planet he was on and a vast expanse of stars above. He took a deep breath and rushed to his ship.

Keeping Maribel on the line, Allen sent his rocket into hyperdrive—using the only warp thruster on his craft. Arriving at Earth's outer atmosphere in just a few minutes, he knew that Mari was suffering and tried to keep talking to her to snap out of it, but failed. He knew that the durability of old ZTI tech was famously enduring, but he was about to test the limits of his trusty craft once more.

Locking onto the trench where Maribel is reported to be, Allen did not waste a second to admire the vibrant life around him. Piercing the surface of the ocean with a thunderous shock wave, the ship regulated Allen's gravitational pressure and his suit maintained his blood flow as he experienced something that should have killed him. The astronaut's desperation to save his star-crossed lover at the bottom of the sea was enough to get him to the Bubble slowly sinking into an abyss full of hydrothermal vents.

"MARI! I'm here! Can you reach me?"

Snapping out of her daze, Maribel looked around and noticed the headlights of Allen's rocketship.

"How-?"

"Doesn't matter. Just swim to me!"

Maribel climbed into the airlock and ejected herself towards the ship, her suit protecting her from the danger-



Suhmuntu

ous water pressure and intense heat from below. Allen welcomed her into his ship and into his arms. As soon as he was sure that this girl was safe, Allen wiped the hair from her face and looked into her eyes.

“I got to you just in time.”

“Why? Why did you come all this way for me?”

“Because I found my soulmate and I was not about to let her die. I promised myself... that I’d get you to the surface.” Allen forced out, as the stress on his body was beginning to catch up to him. Eyes rolling back, his body grew slump underneath Maribel.

With tear-stained eyes, Maribel reached along the familiar control panel to navigate the ship back to the surface. Allen’s unconscious body beside her is the only concern on her mind right now. The disappearance of the Bubble underneath allowed Maribel to breathe for the first time. Entering into the light of the surface above, she breached into the air. As the doors unraveled, the sheltered girl felt the sun tingling her skin and heard the waves crashing against cliffs.

“Hey! Maribel!” a voice yelled from a nearby boat. Two elderly folks were sailing towards the exposed ship. As the faces and the boat grew closer, Mari could make out that ZTI was painted along the side of the ship.

“Who are you? How did you find me?” Mari croaked.

“We got coordinates from this ship.” The elderly woman took Mari’s hand soothingly. The elderly man followed, “We’re Mr. and Mrs. Talina. It’s nice to meet you.”

The Art of War

Connor Schwartz

She entered the classroom as eyes quickly turned
Her arms firmly crossed with her gaze held low
I'd only just seen her but instantly knew
She was quite the sight, and she knew it too

Juvenile whispers filled the air
As she gently sat in an empty chair
And though her golden hair was somewhat of a mess
She was beautiful and elegant, much like a princess

Daydreams of love filled my head
On what it would be like to hold her hand
The thought of it wonderful but ever so brief
As class ended early, to my disbelief

I headed home that day with a song in my soul
I'd see her tomorrow, and she'd be my girl
We'd talk on the phone and have walks on the beach
I had it all planned out, even a speech

I was near the gate when she caught my glance
My heart did a twirl, a flip, and a prance
She sat near the lawn in a white, wooden bench
As I headed her way, my shirt quite drenched

I heard running from 10 feet away
As two army men quickly stopped me and said,
“Son, it’s the draft, pack your things and let’s skedaddle,
World War 3 has started, so don’t you dare moan or babble”

They picked me up and brought me to base
Shaved my head clean and screamed in my face
I was given a gun and told to take aim
But I still couldn't stop thinking of what's-her-name

I'm now overseas, and I disapprove
Looks like I'll get cash and some discounts too
I'm frightened and scared, but I have to be brave
Unless I get shot and bleed out in a cave

That's the truth of living in a world so uncertain
Nobody knows what's behind the red curtain
Our leaders should do better, focus on our youth
For we're the future, and that's the truth

Burning Grace

Harlan Lovings III

Photography





Night Flight

Raymond Chen

Eyes open once more in the dead of night,
Unable to sleep, I can't begin my flight.
The hum of the vent fills the quiet air,
Counting the numbers to silence despair.

Then I'm soaring, a bird with a perfect view,
Racing through skies, fast and true.
The wind rushes past, as I glide with ease,
The freedom of flight, a soul's deep release.

But just as I soared, thunder rumbled below,
A bullet shot forth, with a deadly blow.
The flight took a dive, crashing to the ground,
My body felt heavy, my spirit unwound.

I couldn't move, yet strange eyes I could see,
Snarling canines, circling around me.
I dragged my broken form inch by inch,
As the beasts attacked, tearing my skin with a pinch.

Then I awoke, heart pounding in fear,
Shocked by the nightmare that felt so near.
But the iron walls still held me tight,
What does it mean? What's this sight?

Is this a warning, or simply my fate?
I stand by the sink, holding the cold slate,
Gazing into the blood-red sunken eyes,
And wonder if this vision ever dies.

Spaces

G.W. Rash

Cixin found it difficult to move. He wasn't on solid ground; it felt as if he was floating through the air, or perhaps he was submerged in water.

As he tried to open his eyes, he was blinded by a mix of colors - both beautiful and horrid - that seemed to swirl or pulsate and change shape. Some of the colors didn't, or shouldn't, even exist.

His eyes adjusted and he realized there were a number - it was hard to say exactly how many - of figures before him; not exactly humanoid, but definitely alive. They each held out what might have been their arms, and Cixin's mind exploded in a terrible heat. It spread outwards from the stem to the rest of the brain, and he felt as if a congestion had been cleared.

He screamed.

§

Dr. Briggs's work on the Voyager finally came to an end the morning of May 12th, 2583, after seven years of work. He wasted no time in calling upon some other notable names in the field to observe his work (he had actually asked his wife, Sherry, to call them for him, to which she said "Go fuck yourself").

His first guest, Dr. Cixin Fù (or Fù Cixin in proper Chinese naming conventions), arrived on the 16th, at 3:27 pm.

This would actually be their first meeting, though they were both quite familiar with the other's work. When they finally met face to face in Briggs's lab, they vigorously shook hands.

Dr. Fù excitedly said, "This has been a long time coming, Dr. Briggs! I've followed your studies for years."

"Oh, please, call me Charlie."

"What's this project you've been working on? Your message made it seem quite urgent."

"It is, my friend! I'd like to save the fine details for when our other guests arrive, but perhaps I can provide some context to the background of this project?"

Fù nodded politely.

Briggs said, "I have not for a second taken interstellar travel for granted. Even now, four centuries into Earth's Federation membership, I find our relationships with other intelligent species a wondrous and precious thing. It is pivotal that those relationships remain intact."

"Mm, I think I see where you're going with this."

Briggs nodded. "Dilithium. Reports of dwindling dilithium deposits have worried me greatly, and I'm as

afraid as anyone else that interstellar travel will soon be impossible. A mass stranding event, as it were.”

Dr. Fù interjected, “Are you suggesting that you’ve devised a solution for this problem? Don’t tell me you’ve actually created synthetic dilithium?”

Briggs laughed. “No, no. My invention is far greater!”

Just then, Sherry poked her head through the entrance to the lab. “Your other guests are here.”

Briggs jumped out of his seat. “Perfect timing! Please, see them in!”

Drs. Vernice Brantley and Simon Patrick entered the lab and received a similar greeting, though the both of them were somewhat more familiar with Dr. Briggs than Dr. Fù was, and didn’t need as much of an explanation. Briggs quickly sat them down next to Dr. Fù and gestured to an object laid on a nearby table, covered by a white sheet.

“This,” he paused for dramatic effect, “... is the Voyager!” Briggs grabbed the sheet and yanked it off in a grandiose fashion, revealing a bulky, spherical piece of headgear, fit with a red-tinted visor. The guests remained silent, unsure what they were looking at.

Dr. Patrick finally spoke up, “A helmet? Your message claimed you revolutionized interstellar travel.”

“And I have, dear boy!” said Briggs.

Patrick narrowed his eyes. “With that thing?”

Dr. Brantley nudged him with her elbow. “Maybe we should let Charlie explain his creation?”

Patrick sucked his teeth and gave Briggs a look that said Fine, go on.

Briggs smiled widely, turned to Dr. Fù, and said, “Time

to get down to the nitty gritty.” Fù responded with a polite grin and a slightly forced chuckle.

“I’ll just cut straight to the chase. The Voyager alters the brain waves of the wearer, greatly increasing the natural psychic capabilities of the human mind.”

His guests were frankly too stunned to speak. Dr. Brantley even thought he might have been joking, though she decided not to vocalize that thought, instead saying, “Uh- ‘psychic capabilities’, Charlie?”

Briggs took the helmet in his hands – it was clear that the Voyager was fairly heavy – and looked at his crimson-hued reflection in its visor.

“E.S.P. – extrasensory perception. A pseudoscience, but I do believe there is a basis in reality. Mind you, I don’t think anyone can read the thoughts of others – at least not literally – or move objects with their minds. I believe it to be much more subtle. Certain intuitions; you could view Déjà Vu as a sort of rudimentary clairvoyance.

“I admit, my original hypothesis before beginning construction of the Voyager did include some light philosophy, though I will say it worked out rather nicely. Now, Everything that we perceive is an interpretation by the brain of surrounding stimuli, yes?”

The guests nodded (Dr. Patrick made a show of sighing deeply before nodding his head).

Briggs once again met the gaze of his reflection in the visor of the Voyager.

“My hypothesis was this. If the Voyager could enhance the user’s psychic abilities and change the user’s perception of reality, the user could then change reality.”

“How exactly would you ‘change the user’s perception of reality?’” said Brantley.

Briggs explained, “The Voyager sends certain signals - completely harmless - directly into the brain, which then lull the user into a state of self-hypnosis; the user becomes very susceptible to suggestion, though in a very specific way. You see, the user’s perception of reality becomes essentially malleable. If, while in the state of self-hypnosis, the user begins to believe something that isn’t true, it will become true. Reality will change!”

“That’s completely ridiculous!” said Patrick.

“I’m glad you feel that way; it gives me an excuse to give a demonstration!”

He gestured to the table by his side. “Cixin, is there an apple sitting on this table?”

Fù gave the other guests a confused glance before answering, “No, there is not.”

Briggs placed the Voyager on his head. “In thirty seconds, that statement will be false.”

He pressed a button on the left side of the Voyager, and it made a sound like a large fan or some old computer struggling to start up. Through the crimson visor, Briggs’s gaze was distant and he went slightly cross-eyed and seemed to sway a little on his feet.

“Oh, my god!”

Brantley pointed to the table, where there did, in fact, now lay a large, red apple. Dr. Patrick instinctively jumped to his feet and cursed as Fù stared in shock and was slightly nauseated.

“How the hell is this possible?” said Patrick.

The Voyager quieted as Briggs turned to his guests. With a wide, toothy smile and a crazed look in his crimson-covered eyes, he exclaimed, “Radiation!”

The guests’ concern deepened.

Patrick shook his head and said, “You’ve gone mad!”

Dr. Briggs laughed. “Not at all! I assure you, I am perfectly fine, and the Voyager is perfectly safe!”

“Surely you’re not pumping radiation directly into your brain?” said Fù.

“Yes!” Briggs tapped the side of the Voyager with his finger. “Within each and every one of our brains, there is an untraceable amount of radiation - separate from other forms of natural radiation within our bodies, that is. I personally believe it to be related to cosmic background radiation. One might view it as the soul! A remnant from the creation of the current Universe within each of us,” he laughed wildly, “the afterbirth of God!”

Fù jumped out of his seat and grabbed Briggs by the shoulders and exclaimed, “Charlie, how did you come by this information?”

Briggs laughed again. “I saw it in a dream!”

The color drained from Fù’s face, and he began to tremble violently. He tightened his grip on Briggs’s shoulders and shook him. “You can’t! Do you understand me, you can’t do this!”

Brantley interjected, “Do what? What the hell is happening?”

Fù snapped his head in Brantley’s direction, though he kept his grip on Briggs’s shoulders. “He’s trying to create a fourth-dimensional portal!”

Briggs laughed like an excited child. “You’ve had the dreams! You’ve seen what I’ve seen!”

“I’ve seen doom, you fool! You’ve been manipulated! If you advance any farther, you’ll be directly responsible for

the deaths of trillions!”

“Wrong! I’ll be responsible for the reinforcement of civilization! With the Voyager, interstellar travel will become obsolete! We won’t have to depend on finite resources to travel to other planets! Humanity will no longer be under threat of isolation!”

“What are you talking about?” asked Patrick.

“With the enhanced psychic powers the Voyager provides, the user can achieve instantaneous, long-range teleportation!” Briggs pointed to a far corner in the back of the lab, where the ceiling met two walls. “The corner! The convergence of three-dimensional space; X, Y, and Z. The convergence of the fourth dimension is impossible in that same space.”

Patrick’s eyes widened; he was beginning to understand. “You’re going to use the Voyager to hypnotize yourself into believing you perceive a fourth dimension?”

“Yes, ha, yes! The relationship between the third and fourth dimension is much like the relationship between the second and third. Jumping from point to point through the fourth dimension as a three-dimensional being is much like a two-dimensional being jumping out of an illustration and into another! With the Voyager, I can open a small, brief portal into the fourth dimension that I can use to carry myself to any point in the Universe! It sounds like a work of fiction, but that’s the power of the Voyager! Anything I can imagine can be achieved!”

Patrick shook his head. “But that’s just the thing. If you can do anything, why do you have to open a fourth-dimensional portal? Can’t you just believe that you’re somewhere else, and transport yourself that way?”

Fù exclaimed, “Because it’s a trick!” He turned to Briggs and shook him again. “You’ve been lied to! Open

that portal, and we’ll all die!”

“No, that’s not true! I’ll show you!” Briggs reached for the button on the side of the Voyager.

Fù snatched his arm, but Briggs slammed his head into Fù’s with the full weight of the Voyager.

“Cixin!” Brantley tried to catch him as he fell, but he was too heavy for her and they both crumpled to the floor. Blood oozed out of Fù’s swollen nose as he lay unconscious on top of Brantley.

Patrick lunged towards Briggs, but it was too late. He had turned the Voyager on. What used to be Dr. Simon Patrick painted the far side of the room. He respected Fù and Brantley enough to let them disappear quickly and painlessly. No time to waste now - Dr. Briggs had to save the Universe.

He positioned himself beneath one of the corners of the ceiling, and activated the Voyager. Briggs felt such extreme ecstasy as reality began to shift, exactly as he had predicted it would. What happened next, he did not predict.

As Briggs let himself be pulled into the fourth dimension, like a cartoon jumping off the page, it was quickly apparent that he had no actual control over where he would end up. By all means he should have; he had a clear image in his mind of where he wanted to go (it was Mecca - he thought he’d have a sense of humor about the whole thing).

But instead, he barrelled through fourth-dimensional space at an unbearable speed, barely being held together as a three-dimensional being by the power of the Voyager. The whole time, he had been unable to open his eyes, or perhaps his eyes were open and he just couldn’t perceive what he was seeing.

Finally, something did come into his sight. There was some vague smattering of color that was completely unfa-

miliar and yet he recognized it immediately. He let himself be taken.

§

“You should have listened to poor Cixin, Dr. Briggs.”

Briggs scanned his surroundings; it was his dream! The colors, the feeling of weightlessness, and there before him...

“We are, of course, eternally grateful for your help, but your part has been played out. We’ll be taking the Voyager now”

Just as before, it was difficult to tell how many of them there were; their bodies lacked definition (at least, as we know it) and each figure didn’t seem entirely exclusive or separate from another. There was a larger, central mass that seemed to be where the voice was coming from.

Briggs said, “What? But- but this is my life’s work!”

The voice spoke, “Your life’s work has been to serve us! We planted those thoughts into your head; showed you exactly what you needed to do, and you did it splendidly! You did what we wanted you to do, and now we can fulfil our own grand purpose!”

“I don’t understand! Who are you?” he cried.

“We are the masters of everything! In our own universe, we conquered everything and anything there was to conquer!”

“Your own universe?”

“We do not hail from this realm. You might view this place as a sort of... central train station. Each and every universe in existence branches from here, and can be more easily traversed to through here.

“When we ran out of planets to overtake, we looked beyond the stars to other universes! Our people developed primitive fourth-dimensional travel, and we were among the first to test the technology. It was enough to get us here, but not enough to get us out. We could only open portals through which we could project thoughts.”

“Project thoughts? How?”

“Your species and ours are very different. At this very moment, we do not speak with mouths. And, to use your own metaphor of illustrations on a page, we were able to look through the fourth dimension at a number of pages. That’s how we found you and the poor Dr. Fù.”

Briggs thought for a moment. “Why did you choose Cixin and I?”

“You were simply the most capable and, out of the two of you, you were the most gullible. And so, with that said, we’ll take our leave now.”

Some invisible force pulled the Voyager off of Briggs’s head.

“No, no, stop!”

Briggs was powerless to do anything; he didn’t even know how to move in this space.

The colors around him began to shift and change, moving aside to reveal nothingness (mind you, not just blackness in place of color but truly nothing). And as the Universe opened up and turned inside out, Briggs’s mind was occupied by only one thought:

We’ll start with Earth.

Les Étoiles et La Mer

Suhmuntu

“Je veux t’être,” dit la mer á les étoiles,
Mais, je ne suis pas vous, pensé la mer.
“Pour quoi?” demandent les étoiles.
“Parce que vous êtes tellement jolie,” crie la mer.

“I want to be you,” says the sea to the stars,
But I am not you, thinks the sea.
“But why?” ask the stars.
“Because you are so beautiful,” cries the sea.

“I must copy you to be beautiful,” she admits;
“See, I have sea stars but you are the stars.
I aspire to mimic your vastness, your blackness.
I can only be a mirror to your boldness.”

“But I am empty and cold, lifeless,” respond the stars;
“However when I see you, you possess a wilderness,
A wilderness of happiness while I am nothingness.
So, my love, do not doubt your beauty.”

“Je veux t’être,” dit les étoiles á la mer,
Mais, je ne suis pas toi, pensaient les étoiles.
“Pour quoi?” demande la mer.
“Parce que tu es tellement jolie,” crient les étoiles.

Everything & Nothing

Suhmuntu

Digital Art



Mother

Anthony Garcia

There's nothing so difficult as a love for one's mother.

You'll never forget the day she told you the truth about your father. That he wanted to be there, on your special day, and that her husband was the reason it never happened. You'll never forget the apology that flowed so easily from her lips — practiced, thought out, more caring than anything else she's ever said to you. You've never heard an apology for being left unvaccinated, for being denied doctors appointments, because she forgot. But she apologized on behalf of the men in her life, because she knows you'll continue to love her regardless. You can find it in your heart to resent your father for never being there, you can find it in your heart to hate her husband for destroying the gentleness you knew she once had, but you'll never find it anywhere in your body to turn against the one that cursed you with life.

You can't forget that day she turned on the people she pretends to love the most. Ignoring the reality of her sister's life, denying the truth of her son's. You can't forget that the only words you had for her were "I thought you were smarter than this." You can't forget sitting alone, scared for your future and to experience something new for the first time, and not being able to run to your mom and have her hold your hand through it. You'll forever have to think about the way her ballot must've slid so easily into the

box, and how she must've slept so soundly while you threw back a shot just to keep yourself from facing the fact that your way of life would be forever changed. But she never apologizes, or asks to see life through your lens, because she knows you will love her all the same.

She could betray every value and moral you hold near and dear to your heart, but you'll always forgive her because she read you a few bedtime stories once upon a time. She'll lie to your face, cross you so many times you'll never truly feel trust in another person, pretend she'll change for this one event, and you'll always believe her because you expect some kind of commitment. She'll spew such vitriolic hate, show you every way she believes you should not exist, push to have your kind eradicated in exchange for a few extra dollars, and you'll come running back because she called you handsome today. She'll remain a reminder of what you once were, what you failed to become, and dangle that information above your head at the slightest inconvenience, and you'll still jump into her arms the moment she asks. She'll find ways to shatter your world, destroy your faith in man, and eventually let the memories of those moments fade into obscurity (for herself, but no, never for you), and inside you'll still be that kid that just wants to tell her Mommy, I love you. She could break a million promises, instill paranoia into you hundreds of times, destroy dozens of your relationships, and she'll still be your mother.

You could find ways to blame yourself, because how dare you find it difficult to part with the one who holds you close, how dare you pretend to care about what's important when you're so close to the problem. How dare you not fight back with everything you have, how dare you not challenge every attack on your character, how dare you refuse to acknowledge where you come from. How dare I not have the power to hate my mother, because she should have lost my love the moment she told me exactly how much my life was worth: a couple of bucks off of her groceries every couple weeks.

I am weak. I love my mom, and I can pretend she loves me, just for another night more.

Transform



Kara

Oil Paint and Posca Marker

Daughter's Garden

Steven Petersen

Scene I

Background: Michael is an organ transplant coordinator. He adores his wife and together they want to start a family, but infertility issues with Stephanie have plagued the couple's efforts. Recently a glimmer of hope shined upon the two, blessing them with surprise pregnancy. The pregnancy and blood test results came back positive and everything looked good. The two had hope for the future of their family. Stephanie, who worked at home as a webpage designer, kept to all of her appointments and made sure she did everything her doctor told her to do. The pregnancy was going well at the beginning. Everything checked out with the doctor's visits. She took her prenatal vitamins regularly. Six months into her pregnancy, the baby had developed an irregular heartbeat. At seven months, the doctors felt it necessary to induce labor in an attempt to save the baby's life. Amber Marie Roberts was born two months early. She lived for two weeks before she passed away. Stephanie blames herself for her body rejecting the pregnancy and not providing for her baby. Postmortem depression enveloped her. Even with counseling and medication, its grip held on. Dealing with the tragedy and loss of their daughter has left a gaping hole in their hearts. The doctors said Amber's lungs and heart were just too undeveloped. Michael focused on his work to help pull him through the loss, his wife, Stephanie, was having more of a difficult time.

Setting: Upper-middle class neighborhood in the city of Redlands. Roberts's living room. The front door is rear of center stage. Stage left is an old grandfather clock. Stage right of the front door is a large living room window and next to it the entrance to the hallway that leads to the bedrooms. Stage left of the room is the entryway to the kitchen. The room is wall-to-wall carpet. In the center of the room is a three-cushion couch, a love seat and an armchair, each one placed around a wooden coffee table. The room is functional with modern décor. Stephanie used to keep fresh flowers in a large glass vase on the coffee table, now dry and brittle. The mood in the room is dark and melancholy. The furnishings of the room mirror the mood: the paint appears flat and faded, the fabrics worn and washed, and the carpet dull and dirty. The curtains are drawn letting in very little light, even though it's afternoon, bright and sunny, a typical Southern California day.

At Rise: Michael just got off working a three-day rotation. He is exhausted and looking forward to some rest and time with his wife. He arrives at home surprised to see the house all closed up. He enters the front door even more surprised to see the living room in disarray.

Michael: *(Enters front door)* Hey Steph, I'm home.

Stephanie: *(Silence)*

Michael: *(Walks into living room. Stephanie on the couch. Eyes are puffy and red. He tests her forehead with the back of his hand.)* You ok?

Stephanie: Fine. *(Sniffles)*

Michael: *(sits down next to her)* I'm going to open up the house, let some light in. It's beautiful outside and it's really stuffy in here. We should get some fresh air don't you think?

Stephanie: Fine. *(grabs tissue and blows nose)*

Michael: *(tries to remain upbeat)* How was your day...? What'd you do...?

Stephanie: Nothing.

Michael: *(exhales long sigh. gives in)* Babe, How long are we going to do this?

Stephanie: Do what?

Michael: Pretend like nothing's happened.

Stephanie: I'm not. Are you?

Michael: Huh? Neither am I. But at some point, Steph, we have to find a way to work through this, to find closure. Don't you agree? We went over this with Dr. Miller.

Stephanie: I know... It's just... Maybe later... Right now, I still feel raw... My mind's in a haze. More guilt than anything else.... Was there something we could have done different?

Michael: Babe... the doctors have already explained it to us. There was nothing we did or could have done to prevent it from happening.

Stephanie: I know Michael. I just need to process it.

Michael: Okay. It's been a long shift, I had three patients to coordinate. I'm going to go unpack. You hungry?

Stephanie: I'm fine. I'll nibble on something later.

Michael: 'K. I'm going to call Dr. Miller tomorrow, see if he can squeeze us in for another session. You okay with that?

Stephanie: Sure, if you think it'll help.

Michael: I do. *(walks out of living room)*

Fade to black

End of scene I

Scene II

Setting: Roberts home the following day. Amber's room. In the corner of the room, Stephanie rocks back and forth in a rocking chair. A deep sadness permeates the air. A morose monochromatic world where there should be vibrant colors.

At Rise: Michael just finished his phone call with Dr. Miller's office. He seems hopeful. Stephanie stares off into the distance with glazed-over eyes, lost in her thoughts.

Michael: Steph? I just got off the phone with Dr. Miller's office. He can squeeze us in tomorrow. Babe, I'm really getting concerned. It's bad. You barely get any sleep. You hardly touch your food. Maybe it's the medication. I don't know, but I'm worried about you.

Stephanie: Michael, I just....

Michael: I tell yah what. Our anniversary is in a few weeks. Let's get outta here and go on a trip? Some place warm with lots

of beaches and crystal-blue waters. It'll help us to get our minds off everything here. Let's change the scenery. We can drink Mai Tai's and margaritas' all day long. What do you say?

Stephanie: (*waves away Michael's suggestion*) Nah. I don't want to go anywhere. You go ahead if you want.

Michael: Oh Steph... This is not healthy. I know you're upset and it's hard working through it.—It's hard for me too. Remember what Dr. Miller told us: one step at a time, one day at a time. The important thing is we do it, together.

Stephanie: (*eyes well up*) Michael, I'm trying... (*sniffles*) but it wasn't your body that rejected the pregnancy. I couldn't even provide for our baby as it was growing inside. What's use of taking those damned prenatal vitamins, anyway? My body failed her!

Michael: Is that what you think? Steph, that's not what happened! Amber's lungs and heart were just too undeveloped. They couldn't even be kept going on the machines. The doctors and nursing staff in the NICU said the condition was rare, but it does happen. That is no reflection on you or your body.

Stephanie: Michael! My body rejected her! You know that! (*starts to cry*) I walk into this room and it's empty... Cold... No warmth where it should be. (*sniffles*) the once bright, vibrant colors and fragrances of jasmine and rose have all faded away. Look (*points*) only pale-grays in a musty room that has bleached the life and joy that used to be there.

Michael: (*fights back tears*) Don't you think I'm going through the same thing? Feeling the same way?

Stephanie: (*lashes out*) Michael, it wasn't YOUR body that rejected Amber!

Michael: (*Walks to Stephanie*) This is when we need each other the most. (*he sits down on the loveseat next to her*) Babe, I can't do this on my own. I don't want to do this on my own. But Steph. I AM alone, and it's not fair. We've both lost. At times I think I lost twice. Not only did I lose my daughter, but I lost my wife, the one woman I love the most in this world.

Stephanie: (*snaps, raising her voice*) What do you want from me?

Michael: (*raises his voice as well*) MY WIFE BACK! (*breaks down, begins to cry*)

Stephanie: I don't think I've ever seen you like this before. (*She gets up, sits next to him, and puts her hand on his knee*) Michael, I'm right here.

Michael: No Steph. You haven't been. Not for a long time. You used to love spending hours in your garden, humming and

singing all day. You made it a point to have fresh flowers in the house all the time. This room would be full of American Beauties and jasmine, it was a wall of sweetness I would plow through every time I came in here. The rooms in this house were full of life and joy, especially Amber's. *(He chuckles slightly)* Steph, you would read volumes of books out loud and sing to our daughter. You sang to her! I loved hearing you sing. You've got such a beautiful voice. Now, you're as quiet as a church mouse just sitting in here, staring off. Distant. I can't remember the last time you were in the garden. The vases in here all have flowers that are old, dried-out and brittle.

Stephanie: *(still crying, sniffles)* Is that what this is about? Me not singing anymore? Flowers?

Michael: Really...? Okay. That's it. I'm packing up this room! *(Gets up from loveseat)*

Stephanie: Michael! Don't you dare!

Michael: We are going to talk about this. We are going to see Dr. Miller ... We are going to work through it ... Together ... The two of us, Steph. I need closure. You need closure. We need closure.

Stephanie: Okay Michael. If that's what you want.

Michael: Steph, it's what we both need to be healthy and come out the other side of this tragedy.

Fade to black

End of scene II

Scene III

Setting: At the Roberts Home.

At Rise: Michael is looking forward to spending some quality time with his wife. The blinds are open letting in the sunshine and the house is tidy and neat. Boxes are packed and stacked in the dining room.

Michael: *(enters the front door, notices boxes)* Hey Steph? I'm home.

Stephanie: I'm out back.

Michael: What are you doing? What's with the boxes? (*Walks into kitchen*)

Stephanie: (*she meets him in the kitchen*) Just working outside. (*Dusts off dirty hands*)

Michael: No, what's with the boxes?

Stephanie: Well, after our last visit with Dr. Miller I really wanted to take his advice and suggestions. We're in this together for better or worse. I know you don't want to just forget Amber like she never existed.

Michael: (*cuts her off from finishing*) Babe, that's no—.

Stephanie: (*she stops him from finishing his sentence*) Michael listen. I know that's not what you wanted or were asking. We still have our lives to live and even though she was with us for a brief time, she was the best part of us both. And you're right we need to return to the joys of life and embrace our time with her, bringing the colors and fragrances back into our world.

Michael: Uh-huh? And, the boxes?

Stephanie: I took Dr. Miller's advice to the next level ... It was difficult at first but I muscled through it ... Those boxes, all the stuff from her room ... Michael, it was cathartic. I felt so much better afterwards that I started working in the garden again.

Michael: (*Smiles*) So that's what you've been doing this last week while I was away at work? Steph, that's wonderful. No wonder you didn't say anything.

Stephanie: (*Smiles back*) I have a surprise for you

Michael: You do? What is it?

Stephanie: Come with me. (*She leads him out the backdoor and through the garden to a small nook in the hedges where a wood-slotted park bench sat, nestled between freshly planted jasmine and roses.*)

Michael: (*he smiles*) What's all this?

Stephanie: This is going to be Amber's Corner. I moved the park bench over here and planted some jasmine and roses, the

American Beauties with the strong fragrance I used to always put in her room. *(She lowers her voice)* Michael, I sprinkled some of her ashes in the soil. Every time we sit here smelling those flowers and enjoying this place, we will be with our little girl. This is how I want to keep her memory alive.

Michael: That's a wonderful idea! What about Amber's stuff?

Stephanie: (shows ad-slip for newspaper) I put an ad in the paper.

Michael: But how did you word the ad?

Stephanie: It was difficult trying to find the right words.—But, the weirdest thing happened. The local news channel was talking about Hemingway's best-selling 6-word novel. *(Hands Michael the ad slip)*

Michael: Baby shoes for sale. Never used.—It's like Amber was telling you, "Use this."

BOTH: *(nod to each other)*

Fade to black

End of scene III

Old Dirt Road

Michael Kazmierowski

There's an old dirt road
Down the way a bit.
It's lonely and dusty,
And no one lives on it.

For a mile or so,
It turns and it twists.
It's not found on any map,
And no name of it exists.

With potholes and ruts,
It's battered and worn.
Forgotten by most,
Never used anymore.

Off to one side
A fence barely stands.
Just a couple of old posts,
And rusted barbed wire strands.

Stretched beyond that,
As far as the eye can see,
Is a field of grass
With a single oak tree.

On the other side,
Out in the distance, there's a barn,
An old weathered tractor,
And what used to be a farm.

Up at the end,
The way is blocked
By a sign that says 'keep out'
And a gate with no lock.

The sun shines down
From a cloudless blue sky.
An earth-scented breeze
Blows warmly and dry.

There's a quiet unbroken,
Save for the sound,
Of a solitary tumbleweed
Scratching the ground.

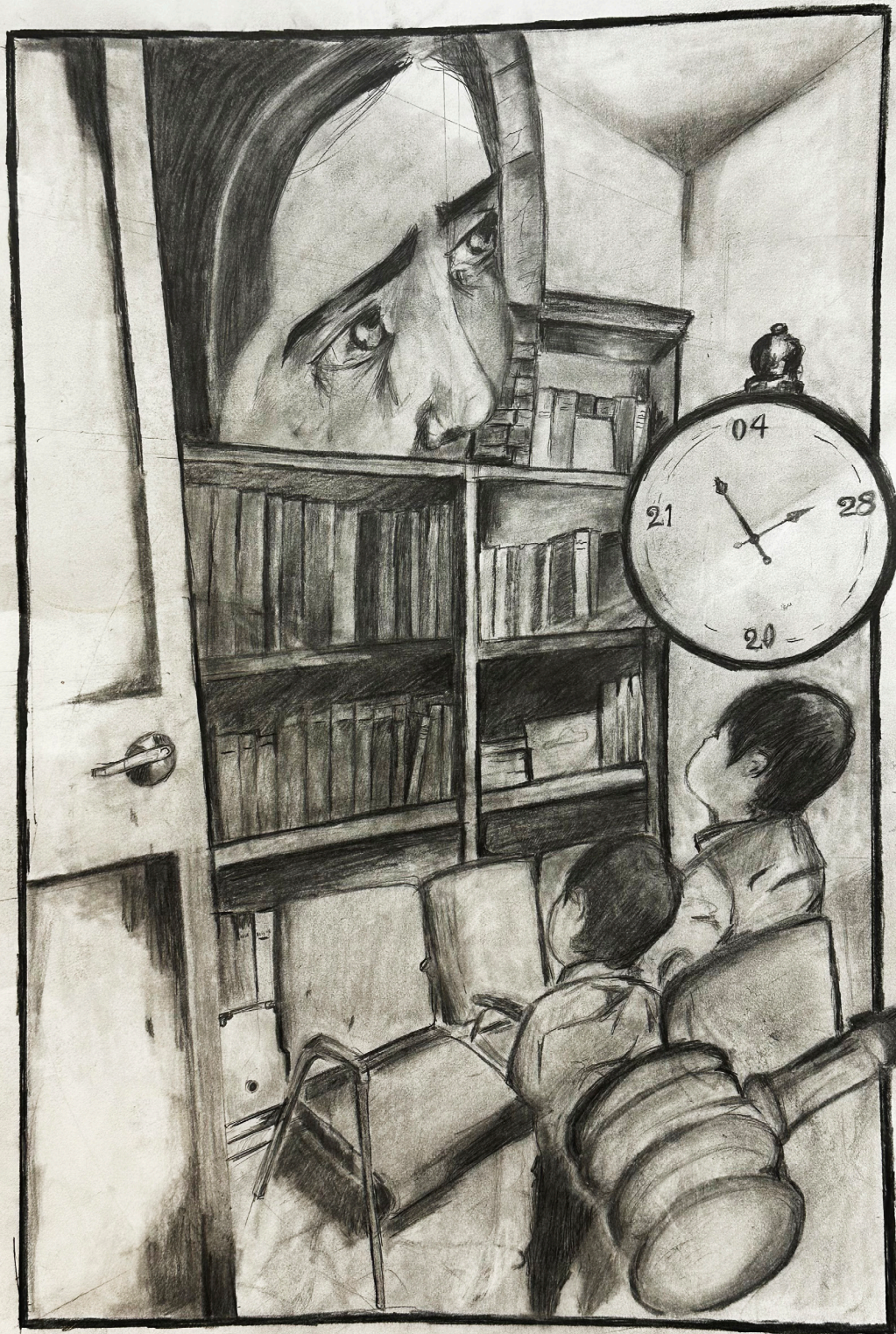
And...

While there may be many like it,
None are the same,
As that lonely dirt road,
Down the way with no name.
Ab Intra- None are the same,
As that lonely dirt road,
Down the way with no name.

4.28.21

Ricardo Castillo

Charcoal



I Started a Meditation Group in the Unlikeliest of Places

Helping others learn to mediate, I thought could alleviate their pain and suffering—

Arnold Brown

A few weeks into the fall of 2014, I decided to start a meditation group in the beautiful Sierra Foothills of Placer County, California. In a way, we were surrounded by national forest, but those of us meditating could not interact with the natural beauty. We were prisoners of the Auburn Jail.

Although self-help groups are commonplace in jails and prison, meditation groups are rare in my experience.

At the time, I was in an open-dorm housing unit with 54 convicts, and I was one of only three Black people in the unit. What led me to meditation in the jail was Ruth Fishel's book, "The Journey Within: A Spiritual Recovery." In July 2013, I retrieved the book from the top shelf of a bookrack in the dayroom of my unit. A few pages in, she convinced me to try the practice.

I began to meditate during regular rides to and from court. The 6 a.m. trips—only 20 minutes long—were humiliating, noisy, cramped and nerve-wracking. I was either shackled around my waist with a belly chain and handcuffs, cuffed to the person next to me, or part of a chained group of 10 people. Anxiety and fear always hung in the air during these rides.

However, by meditating, I managed to remain at peace amid the chaos.

Not long thereafter, I read another book, "Dharma in Hell" by Fleet Maull, whose writing inspired me to create a meditation group. Maull writes about people "thirsting for truth and a path to freedom"—and it was for similarly minded prisoners in my unit that I started the group.

At first, I was reluctant to start a meditation group in jail despite having benefitted from the practice myself. I didn't want to be perceived as weak and vulnerable. Nevertheless, I cooled my ego and started this healthy practice in the unlikely place, knowing that it could help alleviate pain and suffering in others.

I tentatively approached men about attending. To my surprise, they all committed to weekly meetings. Each had some limited knowledge and experience with meditation, but they had never practiced in jail. Therefore, I facilitated the group for several meetings.

Over the weeks, there were, at times, upward of four courageous men who sat with me in an area of our dorm and meditated. Before and after the meeting, we talked about the benefits of our practice. Each shared a common theme of relaxation and peace in the face of our circumstances.

[(Don't) Do] Cry During (After/Before) the Bad (Awful/Desperate/End) Times

Jose Zuniga

How do you mourn the bad times that are yet to come, is it like crying at the thought of your
mother dying?
That only works if they celebrate her death,
if they cheer in the streets, jeer in your face. Ding dong the bitch is gone. They dance and
chant and shit
on her grave. The same grave we all dug, passing the shovel every 4 to 8 years, only now we
no longer want a shovel
we want an excavator or better
yet dynamite, blow it up make it big and throw ourselves inside. Is it ok to mourn when we
saw it coming, when we let it
happen? We were too content with the same old same old, we told ourselves that the last
grave digger at least didn't
dig as fast as the previous one, this one,
same one. We said never again, but ignored everyone that couldn't wait to jump in hole
to hell they imagined
was heaven. But maybe it's time to forget about the grave and better yet grab an urn. Since
we are to burn I might as well be the one to light the
match

? DOMINANT = SUPREME ?

J Asimovic

A nation under god is a farce fable
told by old men committing sin
who ignore taking food off the ethnic family table
The stars and stripes a false flag
No hope for those deemed broke by our National Dad
Uncle Sam a mad man
drunk with power
as he devours communities soured by inequity
Perceptively he provides the recipe
to cook up discrepancy
to be *fed on*
by *generations*
until *looked* on as normalcy
Ignorance fuels pervasive racist views
A fallacy perpetuated by white lies
unconcerned with minority lives
Being kept from ownership
is just another slave ship
sailing the seas of perdition -
A belief system built on an ill-conceived invention
that the poor are responsible for our crime nation
Generational Damnation Inescapable Discrimination
How can we call ourselves free
with such disparity
among our citizenry?
Much work to overcome the sins of past done
Pale finger on the trigger of the mechanized gun
Runaway train off the rails
forgotten details and wind in the sails

of those in positions to rewrite depositions
misrepresenting history with disproportionate prisons

Solace

Suhmuntu

A week of space travel has all led up to this moment. *Don't screw it up now, Solace.* With my sweaty hands gripping the steering wheel, I carefully brought the ship into the atmosphere of my destination planet, Sigma Prime.

The Omega corrected its positioning once we touched the ground. I put on my suit and my helmet, attached my oxygen converter, and sent a message back home: *The Omega has landed.* Opening the hatch, I sighed at the marvelous landscape before me.

As I made my way over to Team Alpha's camp, driving a rover with the resources that they had requested, I heard furious rustling noises. Figures—blurs of pastel colors, jumped out at me. I tried to dodge out of the way, but three of them were hissing and prowling towards me, grabbing at my vehicle. I took out my laser sword to intimidate them. The three backed off, but one more pounced from behind and clawed my leg. My suit was torn as a harsh heat sizzled the skin around my wound. I thrust my sword behind me, managing to nick the arm of my attacker. The alien shrieked and retreated, with the three others carrying the rover effortlessly away.

I rushed to my destination with a limp, panting and sweating in my helmet. My vision blurred, barely spotting a silver metal pole waving up a Z-Tech flag above the cano-

py. Unfortunately, I collapsed before I managed to see the camp.

~

I woke up to a bright orange light. *Ab, the aliens must have abducted me.*

“Good pupil dilation,” said a voice. I realized that someone was holding my eyelids open and holding up a flashlight to my face.

“It's good to finally meet you, Solace. We've been waiting for you.” said the man. I sighed in relief.

My captor was just my new coworker, Jesus Jimenez, wearing one of our matching white uniform suits and a yellow name tag sewn onto it.

He got up and asked me to follow him. I was surprised at the absence of pain in my leg.

“Good as new, huh? That's Fowler's herbal medication that she made herself.”

“This way to the rooms. Ironside had brought your suit and backpack to yours.” Jimenez said softly. There was an eerie quietness to this planet, but the hallway of the infrastructure was humming with technology.

In the morning, I got to meet the rest of the crew. Jimenez and Fowler were flipping pancakes while Ironside and Weber were eating them at the table. I joined them, getting shoved next to Weber.

“Good morning, crew,” boomed a commanding voice. I turned to see my new boss, Captain Carlton Fox. My crewmates quickly stood up to salute.

“At ease,” he said, then turned to me. His smirk changed to a scowl, scanning me up and down. “Solace... Team Alpha welcomes you.”

He looked away from me and grabbed a mug of coffee from the kitchen counter, then waddled over to an armchair facing a window to the outside world.

I remembered the reason why I was here: to deliver their supplies. I ended up losing the very things that they needed and here I am in front of my captain without them. *No wonder he seems cold to me.*

“Today’s mission is to help Solace retrieve the stolen supplies. That is all,” he said.

Scarfig down my food, I followed my crewmates to the garage. Ironside’s domain: laser weapons hanging on the walls, a scrap metal pile, and several rovers parked in the middle of it. They all boarded the biggest rover, with Weber in the driver’s seat. Ironside began to open the garage door, and I started to panic.

“The air here is breathable, silly,” chuckled Jimenez. He invited my embarrassed self to sit in the front next to Weber so that I could lead the way to *The Omega*.

I managed to retrace my steps to where I had gotten attacked. I began to describe the pastel figures that took my ship and how they scratched at me.

“That’s odd. The Pungi aren’t usually aggressive.” said

Jimenez.

“What do you mean,” I ask.

Weber pulled out her Techplate, projecting a holographic image of a picture of a thin, green-skinned creature with big, bright blue eyes and exotic orangey hair.

“This is a Pungi. One of the alien Inhabitants on Sigma Prime. They have an affiliation for the flora and fauna of the planet, always celebrating and nurturing the plants and minor creatures around here. They don’t have any violent tendencies.”

She then swiped to another image of a gray-skinned creature with sunken, yellow eyes and a singular antenna appeared in the hologram.

“This is a Cog. One of the other alien Inhabitants here. They like to use their claws to dig around and mine for the planet’s metals.” Weber explained. “We deduced that the Cogs had attacked you because of your wound.”

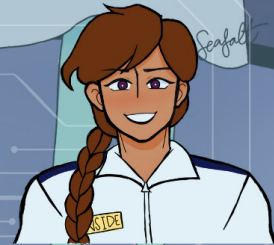
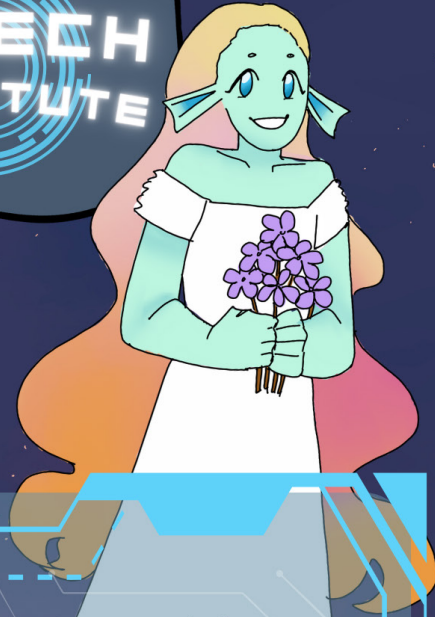
“Let’s go check out the Cogs’ kingdom to ask them about it.” proposed Fowler. Weber rerouted and began to drive us through the forest.

Eventually, the clumps of flora faded to reveal a majestic, towering cityscape. We passed through the streets, heading over to the city center. The images from Weber’s Techplate were real, running around me and talking in their own language. Weber parked next to an important-looking building and everyone got off. Jimenez and Fowler went up to the door of the building and rang a sort of doorbell.

A gruff and elderly version of a Cog opened the door. Jimenez pulled out his Techplate. Fowler began to...dance...? The Cog seemed to be understanding and responding with his own dance. Jimenez’s Techplate was recording its grunts and movements, translating them into words.

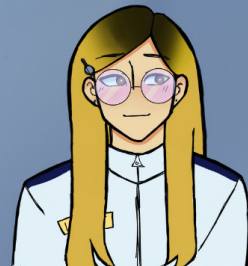


Z-TECH
INSTITUTE



CARLTON FOX JUSTIN SOLACE KIM IRONSIDE

TEAM ALPHA



DAPHNE FOWLER JESUS JIMENEZ MARIANNE WEBER

“The Cog is telling us that nobody reported being near Solace’s ship. There was an attack two days ago in their mines that had everyone locked down.” Jimenez read.

Fowler asked more about the attack. The Cog instead mentioned for us to follow him down a hill to where there was an excavation site. Hundreds of Cogs were working, carrying raw materials like stone, metals, and wood planks around. The elder Cog showed us this glowing grayish stone.

“These are what our attackers stole. Those darn Jollies!” The exasperated Cog huffed in anger.

“Jollies?” asked Weber with Fowler mimicking the question.

“Jollies are this mysterious band of thieves who keep stealing their resources. They’ve been breaking into the mines throughout the past two years, taking various things but mostly this gemstone.”

“This gemstone was discovered within the past two years deep underground. Nothing useful, so we just put them aside. We even shared them with the Pungi because they’re pretty.”

“Could you ask them about the location of the Jollies?” I joined in. The Cog shook his head in response.

“Their whereabouts are unknown. He says to try asking the Pungi.” said Jimenez.

“Perhaps there’s something inside the gemstones that the Jollies are attracted to.” Weber says before taking off.

We left the city of the Cogs and made our way towards the Pungi lands. Ironside was on the phone with Fox again.

“The captain says that once we get a hold of the location of the Jollies that he will meet us there to help us get

back the supplies.” said Ironside.

The rover starts to tread on fresher, more vibrant soil. The ferns here are even more luminescent than what I first saw as I landed here. We begin to see wooden huts incorporated into the trees of the forest.

Stopping next to a pond where the Pungi are gathered, we all get off once more. Fowler and Jimenez approach a taller, more significant-looking Pungi. They stick their tongues out as greetings. I laugh and Weber covers my mouth. Jimenez performs the same process of translating the alien language.

“Good day, Wise One,” Fowler conveys. “Are you familiar with the ‘Jollies?’” The Pungi scowls.

“The Jollies like to come and steal most of our food—all but one type of fruit. They dump their trash on our lands, and are loud and disrespectful to the nature of the planet. We are offended by their behavior.”

“All but one? Which fruit?”

“Our Koku fruit, used as a cleansing of the palate,” said the Pungi. He picks one up from a vine nearby to hand it over to us. Ironside takes it and puts it into her bag.

“Would you happen to know where they live?” Fowler asks.

“We Pungi stopped hosting our ceremonies at the Copious Lake where the first of the Jollies had emerged.”

“May we be allowed to investigate the Copious Lake if you may show us the way?” I ask.

The Pungi reluctantly points us in the direction of the main river. As Jimenez and Fowler end the conversation with the Pungi, they stick out their tongues once more as a farewell.

Our rover managed to drive through the crisp and clean water, the lake in the distance now. The water that flowed into the water was clear...but the water flowing down the waterfall was cloudy and grey like an oil leak from the bottom of the lake.

We noticed some broken decorations embellishing the perimeter of the lake. These items were akin to the flora used by the Pungi to decorate their village. "There's something bright beneath this rubble," Ironside begins to dig it out. She holds up a grey gemstone with a crack, identical to the one that the Cogs obtained in their mines.

"This is what the Cogs gave to the Pungi years ago," recounted Weber. "Is this what's in the lake too?"

"I think so," Fowler observes the quality of the murky water.

Just then, we hear our captain park his hoverbike. His suit was equipped with weapons and ammo. He removed his helmet, revealing a smirk.

"My team, what a wonderful job you have done! Finally locating the hideout of these damned creatures. We can eradicate these rats once and for all. Arm yourselves." Fox says.

"What? Eradicate?" I butted in. "Our only reason we needed to look for them is to get our resources back!"

Fox turned to glare at me. "You, Solace, have not been living here for the past two years. They bring chaos and destruction to the environment around them and you want me to spare their lives?" he says aggressively. He starts to march towards the lair. I ran in front of Fox who stopped in disbelief.

"Solace, don't you dare disobey your captain!"

"I don't care if I defy your orders. Do not hurt them!"

I say as I draw out my laser sword.

"Fine then. I'll gladly defeat you too." Fox smirks.

Slashing and dodging each other's attacks, we grew tired—Fox relentlessly advancing closer to the Jollies' lair.

"Solace! I should have just let you die!" Fox shouted as he thrust his sword toward my chest.

"And yet I'm still alive! Have mercy on them like you did with me!" I plead.

Fox grabs the collar of my suit and brings me close to his face with his sword hovering an inch away from my neck.

"You are not the boss of me. You are supposed to follow my orders like the rest of the crew, traitor!" Fox growls.

I close my eyes and I hold my breath to anticipate my decapitation.

Suddenly, Fox stumbled. Weber, the small and thin girl she was, managed to shove Fox away from me. Jimenez, Fowler, and Ironside were holding up laser guns aimed at Fox. Fox had tumbled down the slope and slipped into a puddle where the waterfall flowed through. His sword had rolled into the waterfall. Desperate to reach for the weapon, Fox crawls into the murky water to reach it and comes out coughing. He drops the sword he retrieved and starts holding his stomach. Laughter emits from Fox's mouth, throwing his head back and laughing uncontrollably with pure joy.

I turned to see the entrance of the Jollies' hideout with four of them staring at all of us. They looked like a combination of the Cogs and the Pungi, but tears were streaming down their faces. They offered the rover to us and retreated inside their waterfall cave.

My teammates and I turn to each other and we lower our weapons. Rushing inside, we see all of the Jollies hugging the back of the wall, cowering in fear. Their cave was littered with stolen fruits and the stolen gemstones from the mines.

We drop our weapons. The Jollies start to smile, as if that were their default facial expressions.

“This water from the lake—this gem—it all makes sense now. The murky water made by this stone has caused their ‘jolliness!’ That’s why our captain is in a state of hysteria. The Jollies don’t eat the Koku fruit because it reverses the effects! He needs to eat the fruit to cleanse his palate!” Weber exclaims. She comes up to me and grabs my hands. “Solace, we need to save him! We need to give him the fruit!”

I furrow my brow. “But, Weber, he tried to kill me and the Jollies!” I replied.

“No matter how badly this man has treated us and the rest of the Inhabitants here, he deserves to be saved!” she says.

I look at the crew and they nod in agreement. I sigh and go up to Ironside for the Koku fruit. I bring it to Fox who is on the floor still giggling outside. Putting a piece of the fruit into his mouth, I wait.

Fox eventually swallows the fruit, and his laughter fades. With a lingering smile on his face, he looks up at us.

“Wha-? Where am I?” Fox says. His face changes to a scowl then to disappointment as he realizes his situation. He covers his face with his arms protectively. One of the Jollies with a scar on its arm approaches Fox and gives him a grassy towel to dry him off.

“Ahh! Oh...” Fox reacts. He hangs his head. “I have been a cruel, selfish, and manipulative leader to you guys

that you all did not deserve. I let my ego and my goal to rule this planet blind me from taking compassion on these... beings.” Fox stands up and quickly leaves on his hoverbike.

Weber smiles and comes up to hug me. “Thank you, Solace, for making the right choice.” I blush.

The Jollie with the scar gestures to the Koku fruit.

“They want to be cured like Fox.” Fowler translates.

“So, no more war? No more stealing?” says Ironside. With a smile, the Jollie invites the rest of them out of the cave and begin to walk towards the Pungi villages.

“No more,” replies Jimenez.

Our team travels back to the base to see our captain waiting for us. He seems to have a shy, humble attitude as he greets us. There was a peacefulness in the atmosphere, making this planet even more beautiful than when I first arrived.

I Know How the World Works

(Between two party)

G.W. Rash

O, you poor, naïve fool!
Know you not the world and its ways?
You've spoken nothing but bullshitteries all evening!

Aha, but you neglect your own miscomings, my misguided friend!

For you see, it is you, not I!

Not I, but you!

Whom is so unfortunately mistaken!

That's not how you use 'whom'.

Shut up! You deflect!

The point!

Of which I!

Am making!

I'm afraid your point has been whittled to a dull nub, old boy.

What a sad existence;

you've no conception of how the world truly operates.

O, I,

I know how the world works

for I can see for I have eyes!

Clouded though they may be.

I know better than to listen to you.

Now, let me educate you:

the world is divided into two types of individuals –

Teachers and Learners.

And yet you appear to be neither.

Only two types?

Such narrow vision!

(Nonexistent)

And in the year of our-

-lord Two Thousand and
what the fuck did you just say?

Only a truth
and nothing less

What you call truth is

only perception

only light bouncing off walls

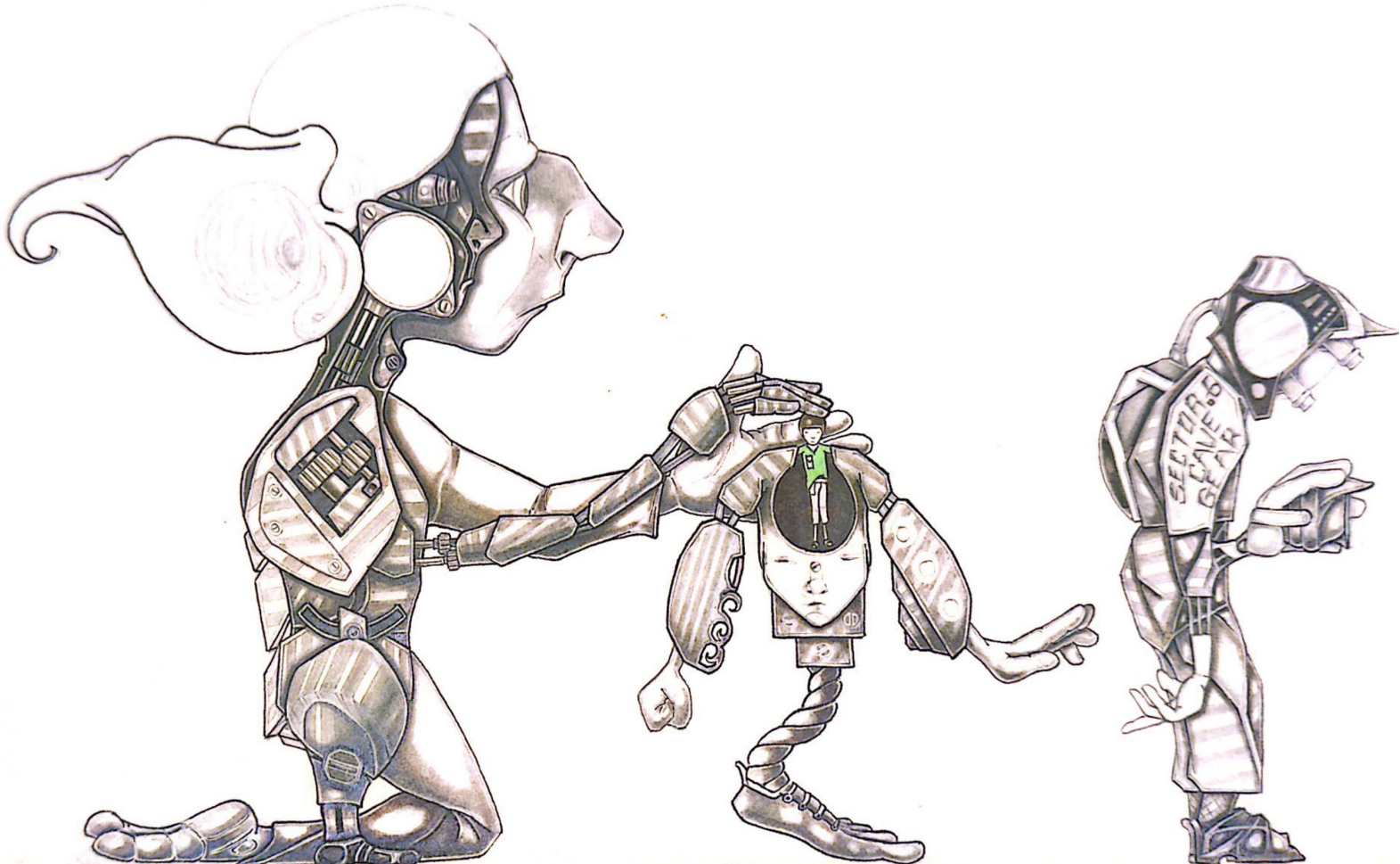
only I

The Begining Part II

Younger brothers unite to find their older brother.

Sean Scanlan

Illustration



Argos Part 1

Alex Zapien

In a land long forgotten from the memories of man, there is a land called Argos. Where everyone has their every need met, and a thing called magic exists. This magic is used not for evil but to make all things in life better for all, and a “Just King” rules not with fear, but with love. Or that’s how it was and should have been for as back as can be remembered. Another thing you should know about the kings from this Land is that they are not hereditary, but were chosen by a magical golden fish. That people say was a god in disguise.

Once a year at the naming day at the plaza, the golden fish speaks to all the people, to swear them into undying loyalty to the new king that has been chosen. It is known that this happens when a great need arises. For you see the king stops aging at 26 years of age and can live for hundreds of years and become one of the Kingdom’s most gifted magic casters. There is also another fact about the king and that is that the moment a new king is chosen, he begins to age again and death will be arriving from that moment on.

Dark clouds have blocked the Sun, and the spring crops have begun to die. People begin to fear the King, for King Gabriel is full of jealousy, envy, self-pity and hurt pride for what seems a life dedicated to a just cause to be cast out like everything he does doesn’t matter. The King’s mistress

is pregnant, but this too is in question. Since the moment the King was chosen he could not have kids anymore. For magic must have a balance. The bond that the King has with his soldiers has begun to weaken, and rumbles can be heard coming from the Shadow Mountain just outside the Kingdom.

But I get ahead of myself. My name is Justin Arogonus, and I have been chosen. But for the first time in history, the future is uncertain. For the King’s mistress has turned the King against the true heir and the King has begun to age. The Guardians that advised the King and were his last defense have abandoned the King and have found me through the power of the bond that unites our people. And have sworn to protect me with their lives. There are five guardians in total.

Word has reached us that strange shadows have been seen at night and people have begun to go missing. Things are getting worse every day and Argos is being covered in darkness. Another training exercise has finished and my growing magical powers have left me exhausted. But with only two months of training I am already the equal of three of the Guardians. My combat skills with the sword and unarmed combat have improved as well. I have been shown techniques that are simple in form but deadly effective. Punches and kicks that are delivered with such power and

speed that could kill if not for the shields of protection that surround the Guardians. I am moving at greater speed as well although that didn't seem possible, and my moves are becoming instinctive now. Yet, instead of being excited about my new found skills, I am frustrated because I am stuck in this cave, and not being able to answer my people's call for help, and it shows in my moves. Though I stay focused, I am again reminded of how much I have learned in such a short time from the Guardians. They begin to look on in wonder on how fast I am learning. But I know the Golden Fish is the cause. I can feel my land now and it is in pain.

Argos is a land that stretches from horizon to horizon. The capital is next to the Adriatic Sea. A giant 20ft thick wall protects the city that speaks first of wealth and might. With battlements every hundred yards, and protected the harbors, one holding the royal fleet and the other for the merchant fleet spread through the sea. Farms of every kind dot the landscape that surrounds the city and are protected by the city watch coming back and forth from the other major cities of the Kingdom. The king's palace sits a top of a hill that overlooks the city, with its own wall and smaller battlements on it. The city was designed in rings like circles ever spreading out from the palace meant to add protection, one street after another in an ever growing ring.

Tomorrow I'll be leaving these caves that have become my home in such a short time. Caves that kept our ancestors safe from what I was able to learn from the walls engravings. Engravings that showed our people fighting monstrous creatures with horns. Asking the Guardian about the engraving got me nowhere. All they would say was "That the King kept them away." Either they didn't know, or they were keeping it secret for some reason. I let it go again, when I got the same answer. For tomorrow, I'll face the King for the second time. The first being the naming day, when all seems magical. I don't tell the Guardians, but I'm worried about the King's guards and soldiers. I have begun

to feel them like an itch I can't scratch. I hope that they don't feel me in the same way I can feel them.

I wake the next morning refreshed and I look at my reflection and I cannot see myself in the muscular looking body with wiry blond hair and eyes shining with shrewd intelligence. The reason for this is because the moment you are chosen, your body grows at an accelerated rate. As the need demands. As I put on my armor it somehow shifts and read justs to fit perfectly to my body. The Guardians already have my meal ready and have their armor on as well.

My destiny awaits.....

A Time of Despair and Hope

Alex Zapien

Sometimes it feels like time is my only friend.
And dreams are where I go to escape,
To live through the characters of my books
Who always seem to know what to say?
And are always there, when you need them.
As tears of regret finally dry up,
Since they have nowhere else to go,
Thoughts of the walking tragedy I have become, resurfaces
Before at last, finding my Lord and Shepherd,
Where I have found hope and everlasting life.

Lost Lovers

Suhmuntu

I've got a lover across the sea
"I'll come back for you," he promised me.
I wait and wait for his return
But each passing second seems to burn.
I'd wail and cry from time to time,
Yearning for his love—is that a crime?
Mountains of letters I sent on every ship
But my hold on him was losing grip.
Little did I know he missed me very much
That day after day he desired my touch.
Aboard the boat meant to fetch for him,
The tides of our love were too deep to swim.
My flame of hope continued to wane
For our lost love was my bane.

Anime Girl #2

Raymond Chen

Color Illustration



Degenerative Moments

G.W. Rash

As were the Greeks
(or was it the Romans?)
I expect I will be lost
only truly

And though the cliff notes may be known
the real things
the important things
will die with me

I'm sure now that it was neither
the Greeks or the Romans
of whom I was thinking

(my mind must teeter
from one truth to the other
else I'd feel I were sinking)

Perhaps it was the Egyptians
who evaded the eyes of history
(and seemingly my own memory)
like an old photo album of answers
collecting dust and water damage
in the attic

...

The longer I seem to go on

the more the analogy is lost on me
like some childhood memory
of ancient piano chords
and

oh

I have it now
it wasn't the Greeks
Romans
or even the Egyptians
but the Norsemen the

the

...

the one thing I shall never have
is time enough
to re
member
the minutiae
of the faces
of the people
that I have and have not known
I can only sit
and watch
as they float past
like clouds in the sky

indistinct

...

There's something else now
skirting around the spotlight of my mind
maliciously jabbing at my lungs
and pulling the frequencies out of my ears

laughing
while I fail to remember its name

and laughing
as I fall backwards into my favorite time

and laughing
as that time fades into one of those clouds

that are so hard to make out

...

There was something more to this

was
n't there?

something in
The
clouds?

something

I was trying to recall something
some

a people
yes

was it the Greeks?

or the Romans?

or the Egyptians?
Or

Rambo

Michael Kazmierowski

A time long ago in the age of beasts and men, when fierce warriors roamed the land and fire-breathing giants flew across the sky, a young dragon lay coiled in the bowels of a volcano. Orphaned by an invading Chin army, she was quite possibly the last of her kind. However, that fact was of less concern to her at the moment than the figure she had been observing for many days. From the instant he arrived, the man had sat still as a stone, making no effort to move. Until early one morning, as the sun rose in the East, he seemed to awaken with it. Drawing the sword that lay upon his lap, he held it up so that it shimmered like fire, reflecting the orange starlight.

Curious, and wanting a closer look, the dragon stood, spread her wings, ascended into the blue skies overhead and alighted beside the stranger. So absorbed was he in quiet concentration, that he made no gesture or move to acknowledge her arrival. Slowly he lowered and rested the blade in front of him and looked up. She was amazed to find that his eyes shared the same golden color as her own. “A breath, it’s been days,” she said.

Looking away and wearing a face of repose, he responded with a deep and unhurried voice. “A word, it’s been days.” His presence drew her in.

She moved closer, speaking to his sadness, “breath, for

life and death.”

His expression twisted and with a voice edged with contempt, he growled, “Quiet, unspoken.”

Cautious of his irritation, she withdrew to rest in reserve. High above, the stars went to sleep, and the light of the day emerged about them. A light cool breeze blew from the North, carrying with it a whispered thought. “Even breath is heard.”

A time later, the Ronin sat meditating on death, as the dragon lounged nearby, casting a shadow that shielded him from the midday heat. A comfortable space, like one known to long acquainted friends separated the two, while a waxing afternoon sun waned across a cloudless blue sky.

Suddenly, a cry from a carrion bird high up pierced the silence. Awakened from his thoughts, he found an amber reflection staring back from her giant eyes. Unnerved, he turned away and moved to gaze at the world spread out below, eventually speaking to the distance, “arriving in the moment.”

Surprised by his abruptness, with words more an accusation than response, she replied, “living in the next moment.”

Her insolence drew a sneer. Turning to meet her leering inspection of him, he said “A journey of many steps.”

Impatiently she interjected with all the petulance borne of youth, “never beyond the first step.” The molten exchange between the two of them stretched the moment.

He spoke through clenched teeth “knowledge lies within wisdom.”

A flash, before a Cheshire grin spread across her face. Her glowing eyes sparkled, trapping him with her stare. “Wisely, what is there to know?” she said.

A descending quiet enveloped the mountaintop making space for the voice of a whipping wind, “fading echo eternal.”

A time passed, the sun, blanketed by woven hues of purple and pink, burned red as it settled into sleep below the western horizon. The ancient warrior abandoned his ritual suicide and contemplated the effects of his past on the present. Though the stillness of his body revealed nothing of his inner turmoil, the young dragon sensed a strength within his loneliness. She voiced a consolation, “To live is to know.”

Wearing the expression of resignation or acceptance, he shook his head, ridding himself of an unused thought. Not one word wasted, his reply was simple. “Knowing death knows less.”

She understood his conflict, and she was unwilling to let him play victim to it. Weighing her words with care, she spoke to his understanding, “Every less is more.”

The strangers shared a heartbeat the breadth of a lifetime before the barest hint of a smile tugged at the corners of his mouth. Eventually conceding to the presence, he offered her his lasting words, “Every end begins.” The still air pressed against them as they appraised the truth of one

another, while surrounding night, lit by a moon reflecting morrow’s morning, gave life to song. “Nothing is over.”

There is a tale told of the Sun and the Moon, that they were lovers once, and in their union, they created the Earth, but in so doing, they defied the laws of the universe, and were cast apart forever—for it is with Dragons and Men and Moons and Stars that greatness is born in Heaven.

The Art Thief (AKA MADNESS)

Sean Scanlan

Illustration



This Is Not the End of the World

Jesus Martinez

The wooded hills burned for days,
ash coating the lungs of children,
the sky turning the color of rust.
The animals fled,
or didn't.

This is not the end of the world.

The oceans swallowed homes,
rooftops became islands,
the water filled with bodies
that no one came to count.

This is not the end of the world.

The rain stopped falling,
the crops curled into dust,
a mother held out an empty bowl,
and the child knew better than to ask.

This is not the end of the world.

The hospitals overflowed,
the sirens never stopped,
the dead lined the hallways,
and the rich kept breathing.

This is not the end of the world.

A woman disappeared on her way home,
a man said it was her fault,
a judge said the man had a bright future.

This is not the end of the world.

The wages stayed the same,
the rent climbed higher,
a father worked three jobs,
and still came home hungry.

This is not the end of the world.

A flag waved,
a chant echoed,
a book was banned,
a student arrested,
a neighbor disappeared,
and an identity erased.

This is not the end of the world.

But today...
the WiFi went out,
and the barista got my order wrong.
The traffic was unbearable,
and my phone battery died.

This.
This is the end of the world.

Remnants of Her

Dana Villafana

There was a prickly feeling on my skin, like she was watching me. My eyes kept flicking to her armchair, expecting her to be sneering at me from a curtain of brittle brown hair. Maybe that was a cruel way to think about her, but it was honest.

I threw myself into the couch across from her armchair and looked at it—the soft brown leather, the worn spots, the stain on the arm. It should be special, the place where my mother took her last breath. I didn't feel anything other than phantom exhaustion at the thought of dragging it downstairs.

The dining table was cluttered with the last two months of bills, coupon booklets, and magazine subscriptions from three tenants ago. I knew I needed to clean it up and get moving. I should dig out the shredder and the laptop and then throw in a load of laundry while I was at it.

If I was going to be, I suppose I could be grateful that it had been her instead of my father—if only because her apartment would be easier to clean. My mother had never been a very sentimental woman. There was a purpose behind everything she owned.

Well, almost everything.

From where I sat, I could just see a small round spiky

cactus sitting in a clay pot in the center of the dining table. The various papers covered it, but I could just see the faded lemons painted around the rim. There was no way.

I remembered painting that thing when I was in the second grade, a bit after the first move. I thought it'd make her happy after she had to leave the lemon tree behind. I thought she'd thrown it out as soon as I'd handed it to her.

My mom shouldn't have ended up in an apartment.

When I was a kid her pride and joy was the dwarf lemon tree in the backyard. It was crazy to think we had ever had a backyard. My mom planted it when we first moved in, when we thought the dingy little house with mint green paint on the inside and cheerful sunshine yellow on the outside would be ours forever. Her mother had one in the old house in L.A. back in the 80s.

It wasn't huge or anything but enough to give off shade when it was hot. Living in California, that was all the time. My mom loved that tree more than anything.

When everything crashed around our ears, we got evicted and had to leave behind the tree and the yard. The next couple places had closed off patios, but my mom never had a real yard again as long as she lived.

In the stale air of the apartment the tiny succulent was the only green I could see. It looked well taken care of, unsurprisingly. I just couldn't tell why it was stuck in my shitty old pot.

Maybe it was all she'd been able to find. I'd never had a green thumb, but it was a cactus, I could learn to take care of that. I cradled the thing in my hands and brought it to the tv stand. It sat there while I stacked pots and utensils into cardboard boxes.

The door to her room was closed and I almost turned around. As a kid I must have been told a thousand times to never go into her room, unless she was dying. Well, she wasn't currently dying, just dead. I didn't think she'd appreciate the loophole.

Her bed was made, her drawers closed with no clothes pouring out, and her shoes were lined up neatly by her door.

Everything was covered in a fine layer of dust that twirled like glitter in the sun streaming through the blinds.

Her closet was the only evidence someone lived in this room, that it wasn't some picture on a realtor's website. Five neatly stacked plastic boxes held her life, except for something hidden behind all of them.

I could just barely see it, but I pulled out the only thing that wasn't plastic—an old cherry wood jewelry box.

It had been a gift from my dad for her 23rd birthday. She'd thrown out everything he'd given her after the divorce. I'd thought the box had been one of the first things to go.

I looked at the dinged and damaged jewelry and remembered each piece glinting in the fluorescent light of the bathroom. She would hold them all daintily against her neck and wrist. A quick, "What do you think, honey—" thrown over her shoulder, sometimes to me, sometimes to

dad.

We rarely got invited anywhere, either family functions or work parties, so mom had always reveled in getting ready when we did. As a kid, I reveled in it with her, at least until we got there and there was only boring grown-up food and not a chicken nugget in sight.

My pristinely straightened hair stayed untouched, but I usually ended up with bruises on my upper arm by the end of the night. Too much talking about childish things, that was what she always said. I always thought it was a self-fulfilling prophecy—we went somewhere, she yelled at me, people were uncomfortable, and people acted like we didn't exist when it came time to write their guest list.

A faint smell of floral baby powder hit my nose, and I leaned into the box to soak in the scent of her perfume. The name was something generic and boring like *Bloom* or *Garden Rose*, the kind of name that fell out of my head as soon as I stopped looking at the bottle. The company had stopped making it about seven years ago, but my mother had never picked anything different, only buying as much as she could and using those bottles to the last drop.

I let one of the thin chains drag over my fingers like sand. The sound brought back too many memories. Everything in the box looked like it hadn't been touched in years. Each necklace, bracelet, and ring were right where it was supposed to be—except her engagement and wedding rings. Those I had watched her pawn, calling them cursed gold. I don't know if she'd expect me to pawn the rest or keep them. Well, it wasn't like I was in a rush.

I took the box to the living room and kept it next to the poor plant, safe from all my inelegant rummaging as I pulled the boxes out of the closet and into the living room, labeling them as best I could. Pictures, old bills, check stubs, IRS documents, and on and on. Most of it would be thrown out, but I'd keep the pictures and hints of my

mother's life. I had never made a secret of being a sap.

By the time the sun sank low, and I was forced to turn on the lights, my mom's entire life was in boxes and either in the living room or in my car. All that was left was for the furniture to be hauled to the dump the next day.

Maybe it wouldn't be the worst thing in the world to steal my mom's bed for the night. I backtracked my way through the apartment. The dust was disturbed but still lingered on the comforter. As I pulled on it to shake it out, something flew at me. It bounced off my face harmlessly and hit the floor.

The soft, curly brown fur almost made my heart stop, but no. Its ears were a little too long. Instead, there was a faded tag on its leg that read Bunny in shaky childish penmanship.

I sat on the bed and looked at the little thing. It was definitely old enough to be my mom's, but I couldn't believe it.

The flowerpot had a purpose, the jewelry box could have been a money saver, but there was no reason for her to keep a stuffed animal, especially after what she did to mine.

There was this teddy bear when I was a kid. An average one with curly, light brown fur, plastic black eyes, and a sewn-on smile—or frown, depending on the angle. Its name was Teddy. Maybe not the most unique name, but regardless, Teddy had been my best friend.

It wasn't like I hadn't tried with other, real, kids, running up to people, chatting their ears off with facts about dinosaurs and getting a firm "No," when I asked to be best friends, had gotten old around the sixth time it happened. So, I ended up being just me and Teddy, isolated in our own perfect world.

When things were good, the sun shone down on us,

and we could lay in the back under the lemon tree my mom loved more than me, we were brave adventurers, scouring a land before people, pirates on a voyage for treasure, astronauts about to land on Mars or somewhere cooler. When things were bad and there was screaming and accusing and the lemon tree wasn't fun, just safe, we were quieter. Spies who needed to stay silent, a doctor and patient trying to keep the other breathing.

I really loved that bear.

It got thrown out in the final move—the last place I'd lived with her. Maybe if we'd had a basement or an attic to hide old things in, Teddy would still be around, but my mom had looked at the tiny, worn thing I'd had since I was three and chucked it in the trash. "You need to learn to talk to real people, not just your bear," she had said.

It was the biggest fight we'd ever had. She hadn't been wrong exactly, but I had been seventeen and on the verge of moving out even before she took it away. For eight years after, I'd only seen her on her birthday and holidays.

Maybe it was stupid that my final straw had been a bear. Maybe it was stupid that I held the bunny in a strangle hold, debating tossing it out the window.

I unclenched my fist and laid down. I let the thing rest on my chest. Maybe my mom's mother had tried to throw it out when my mom was seventeen.

I'd keep the succulent, I'd keep the jewelry, but the viewing was the next day. I could lay her to rest with the bunny. She'd be happier to have it there than me anyway.

Ab intra - Her closet was the only evidence someone lived in this room, that it wasn't some picture on a realtor's website. Five neatly stacked plastic boxes held her life, except for something hidden behind all of them.

Contributors

AMYREY ARTIENDA is a hobbyist artist from San Diego, California. Fueled by her love of anime and cartoons, it inspired her from a young age to draw the characters she created. She hopes to continue to build up her skills so she could draw from memory.

JOSHUA ASIMOVIC MORRIS (J ASIMOVIC) is a first generation Serbian San Diegan. They have been using their imagination to create for as long as they can remember. Creating allows everyone to connect with their true selves. When another being connects with another's creation, there is no communication more authentic. Skateboarding, art and music are Joshua's spirit animal. They love pugs.

KARA BARRAGAN is an artist based in San Diego, California. She is completing her final semester at Southwestern College as an Art major. She is planning to earn her BA and in the future teach at the high school level. She enjoys creating digital and traditional art through painting and illustration, exploring her queer identity and heritage.

ARNOLD BROWN is a part of SWC's Restorative Justice Program that offers college to currently incarcerated individuals. Making good use of time meant to punish, Arnold is working toward earning an associate degree in communication and a certificate in ASL as he prepares for a BA program at UC Irvine.

LEA CADENA is a writer from San Diego, California who is currently attending Southwestern College to obtain her Degree in Psychology. Her hobbies include Photography and Film Making.

RICARDO CASTILLO MORALES, not understanding who they are, they started drawing.

RAYMOND CHEN is 42 years old and a first generation immigrant from Taiwan. He worked as an engineer before his unforeseen incarceration. He has focused on art and writing during his incarceration. Progression and technology has always been his passion, but it became a problem in an institutionalized setting. Through art and creativity, he was able to vent his frustration while elevating his artistic skills.

ABEL ESCOBEDO is a writer from Tijuana who is constantly writing about the human condition in an attempt of avoiding it, this does not work. He also likes dr pepper, you should buy him one.

ANTHONY GARCIA is a second year student at Southwestern College studying English. He plans to obtain a Master's Degree and work as an English professor at the Community College level. He enjoys writing fiction stories that reflect his life and experiences, shaped by his culture and identity.

SAMANTHA GONZALES, (SUHMUNTU), is a Filipino student at Southwestern College. She is pursuing an English and Liberal Studies degree to become a future teacher. Gathering inspiration from nature and her faith as a Christian influences her hobbies such as writing, drawing, and making music.

MICHAEL KAZMIEROWSKI is currently pursuing a degree for transfer in communications. With a lot of hard work and a bit of luck, he hopes to apply his education to helping others and exploring the world.

AARON KING is a student of SWC. He was born in Florida. He has lived in the custody of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, since 2018, and at RJ Donovan since 2023. He enjoys writing.

HARLAN LOVINGS III is an African American filmmaker and photographer with a passion for storytelling through visual art. Currently pursuing an associate degree in Film, Media, Television, and Photography at Southwestern College, he is dedicated to mastering his craft. Harlan aspires to teach film studies at the high school level while continuing to bring his cinematic visions to life. When he's not behind the camera, he enjoys watching films and spending quality time with his family.

JESUS MARTINEZ is a student writer from Tijuana, Baja California. He goes to Southwestern Community College as an FTMA and English Major. Jesus aspires to write for film and tv, but also plans to invest time into writing novels. He enjoys anything creative; art, architecture, film, and writing.

NOAH MAYO is an aspiring writer from San Diego, California. He attends Southwestern College with goals of transferring to SDSU. He is majoring in Film, Television, and Media Arts, on the side of writing and production. He is a cancer survivor, who enjoys writing fictional stories.

MARIO POSADA is a Writer, Director, Executive Producer, film maker and sketch artist from San Diego, California. He goes to Southwestern College a Film-Psychology Ma-

ior. Mario plans on attending CSU Northridge's film program and creating documentaries and various other feature length projects. In Mario's downtime, he draws and organizes film shoots evoking the style of his favorite contemporary comic book artists like Xaime Hernandez, Charles Burns and Daniel Clowes, Mario also enjoys film makers like David Cronenberg, Bong Joon Ho, Luca Guadagnino and Sean Baker.

RAPHAEL RAMEY (R.A.S. DE RAMAVIS) is Marine Veteran and a 2nd year Sociology major of Southwestern College through the Restorative Justice Program offered to incarcerated individuals. He uses his time to enhance his education while he tries to earn a chance to return to society a better contributor to the good of community. He has been working on becoming a published author having already completed a full-length urban fiction. Originally from Houston, Texas, he is currently domiciled in R.J. Donovan Correctional Facility in Otay Mesa. He hopes that his writing will inspire others to use their creativity.

ALEXIS RAMOS is a poet and English student at Southwestern College. Sometimes they do art.

GUNNAR RASH (G.W. RASH) is a student from Imperial Beach, California. He attends Southwestern College as an English major. He enjoys writing Science Fiction and poetry, and wants to hone his craft in school before making a career out of it in the future.

HEBER RIOS (CONNOR SHWARTZ) is an aspiring writer. He currently attends Southwestern Community College as an English Major and is on his second and final year. He plans to transfer to either to the University of California San Diego, or San Diego State University. He enjoys reading, playing video-games, watching movies, and talking about Star Wars for hours.

CHLOE SALDANA is in her 2nd year at Southwestern in preparation for her Master's in Literature. She aspires to be a writer that can write in any form. You can find her either reading books or watching anime.

SEAN SCANLAN is 42 years old and a proud father of two. He grew up in Laguna Beach and considers himself a beach boy. He enjoyed the pleasures of any and all beach activities which included skateboarding. He has always enjoyed art, but it wasn't until he got arrested where he actively pursued meaningful artwork. There are days where he is consumed with ideas and creations and doesn't have a way to express them on paper. Sean has dabbled his foot in the world of innovation where he created a product and was solely responsible for the creation of a product patent. He looks forward to the opportunity when he gets out to continue his pursuits in this venture and the artistic world, exploring his other artistic abilities.

ROBERT SPANN is a father, student, and husband, that has dedicated this time in putting his self on paper. Born in Los Angeles California in the winter of 1985, Robert Spann has been one to seek out the why's and have not's of life. In his spare time Robert is skilled welder, and part time student at SWC. You can find more writings on Robert in the coming future.

ESSA THABET has always enjoyed coming up with many stories and screen writing whenever they have the opportunity. They hope to one day write out all their ideas and be able to have a story for every genre possible.

DANA VILLAFANA is a writer in San Diego, California. They are a Communication and English major at Southwestern College. They mainly write character focused stories dealing with emotional turmoil.

MARIANA VIZCARRA MOYA is a student at Southwestern college. Despite aspiring to be an architect they have a passion for writing. They hope to be published one day.

ALEX ZAPIEN is 44 years old. Born in Los Angeles and moved around quite a bit. Alex didn't know who he was until he came to prison, where reading and education became a major part of his life. Some of the lonelier aspects of his life manifested the words that became his truth. Those words eventually found their way onto the page in the form of poems and fictional writing. Alex now spends his days continue to read and write and being of service to his unique community.

JOSE ZUNIGA is a writer based in San Diego, California. He is currently attending Southwestern Community College and plans on pursuing an MFA in creative writing. He likes writing fiction with a focus on finding beauty in the mundane.

This literary magazine was brought to you by our Southwestern College's writing club, The Other Writers Guild. The Other Writers Guild was created in the spring semester of 2008 by a group of students who were eager to write and wished to have a forum in which to show their work. The club has been committed to offering an open platform for members to show ideas and work in an environment that is comfortable and that offers positive feedback.

Anyone who attends our school and has any interest in creative writing is welcomed and encouraged to join. If you are interested or want more information please contact us at:

swccreativewriting@gmail.com

visit us on our official blog

www.theotherwritersguild.blogspot.com

or visit our linktree

linktr.ee/theotherwritersguild

Once again thank you for your continued support.

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